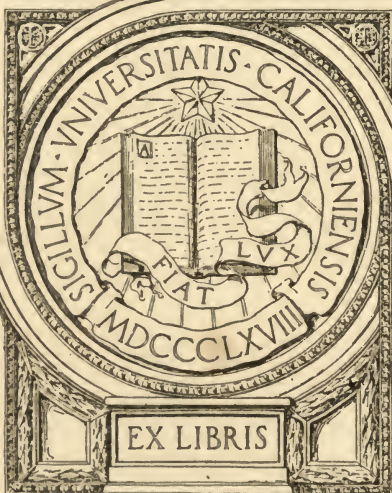




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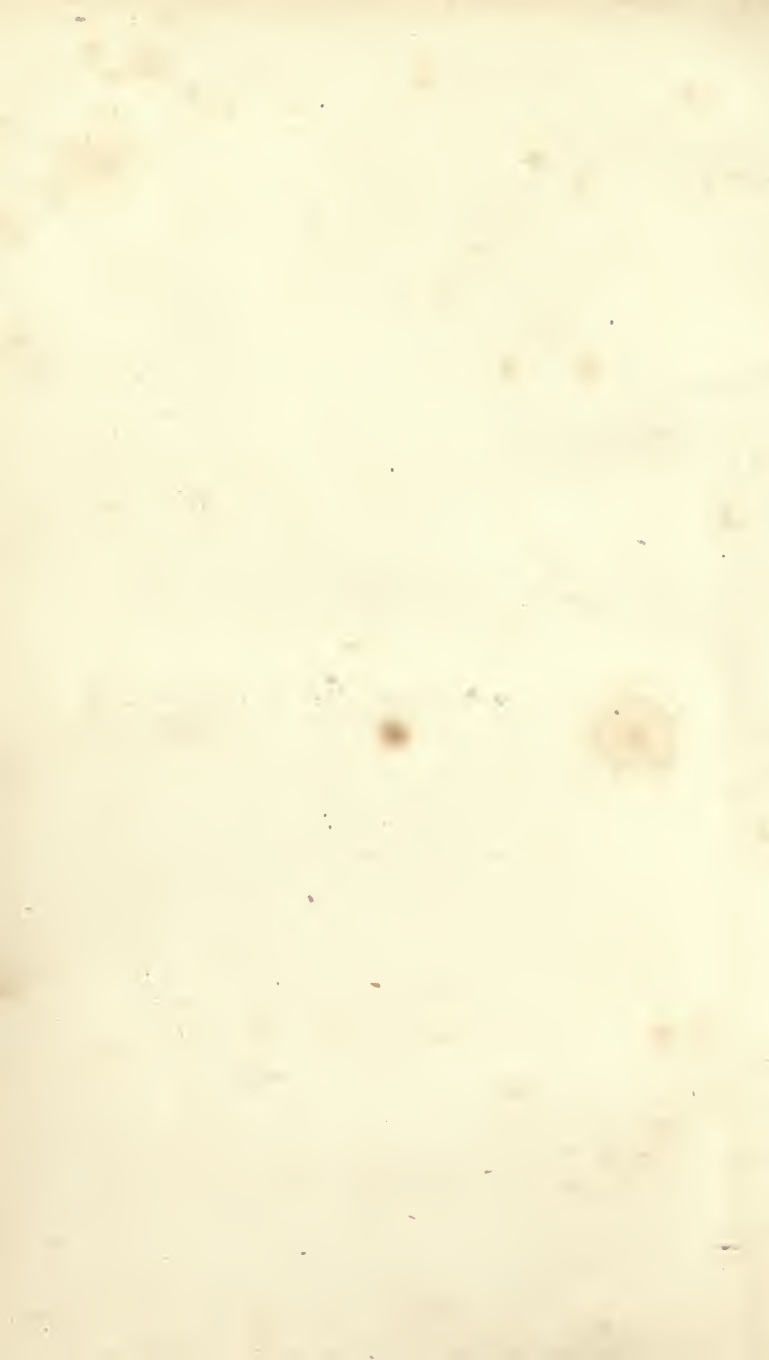


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James C. Gordon.



PAUL FANE;

OR,

PARTS OF A LIFE ELSE UNTOLD.

A NOVEL.

BY N. PARKER WILLIS.



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PAUL FANE.

CHAPTER I.

It was getting toward "the small hours" of a summer's night in 1830, when Paul Fane tapped at the closely shuttered window of the house which had always been his home. The family prayers, invariable at nine o'clock, were long over, and at the front door, inexorably locked at ten, the truant son now stood—excluded for the night by the stern father whose hand had turned the key, but knowing well that sleepless eyes were watching for him, and lips whose good-night blessing and kiss would await him, even till morning.

Softly and noiselessly the door opened. The admitted moonlight shone for a moment upon the placid features of the mother, and, as the door closed again, and left the unlighted staircase in darkness, Paul passed on without speaking; for their customary good-night was a half hour

or more in his far-up study in the attic—where their voices would be unheard, and where the son's history of his day, and the mother's tender sympathy and counsel, could be freely exchanged. To learn by heart each leaf of her boy's mind, as it was written and turned over, was the indispensable happiness of each day to that friend-mother.

The small room in the attic story, with its one gable window to the north, had, for years, been allowed to Paul for his nominal study; and, as it contained no bed, and there was no excuse for intrusion of servant or other person, it was reasonable for him to keep the key, and preserve it sacred to the sole use and knowledge of his mother and himself. The main secret it was thus enabled to cover, was told by the pallet and easel on which the lighted lamp now threw its pale lustre, by the canvas-frames turned with their faces to the wall, and by the engravings, studies, and sketches with which the sloped ceiling was irregularly covered. Paul had an unconquerable passion for Art, and his every leisure hour was spent in the endeavor to make skill of hand keep pace with his maturing taste and knowledge; and the necessity to conceal this, was in the complete disapproval, by his father, of "any such unprofitable mode of life"—a disapproval he had expressed so harshly, at the first efforts of the boy's pencil, that it was evidently a choice between concealment and an open opposition, of which the mother well knew the consequences. The col-

lege education of her boy depended on the possibility, to the father's mind, that he would be a preacher of the Gospel ; and with even the probability of this removed by any avowed determination to become an artist, the inevitable result would be an apprenticeship at once to business. To the view of the stern and orthodox hardware merchant, the profession of an artist was, in the first place, learned by studies verging on immorality, and, in the next place, it was one of small and uncertain profit. His decision on such a point, if left *passive*, would simply be never modified nor reversed—if made *active*, by argument or open disregard, would be aggravated to extremities. And thus had been made necessary, to the mind of Mrs. Fane, a system of concealment hitherto practised with success, and by which her boy had followed the usual course of education openly, but with a twin pursuit of the study of Art in secret.

The lamp was arranged with its shade, for the hour or two of reading which it helped to borrow from the night, and Paul, closing the door and receiving then his mother's kiss of welcome, sat down to his confessional of love. With her hand clasped in his, he made the tender inquiries as to her own passing of the time, her spirits for the evening, her visitors and her books, and then went on to tell her of his engagements for the day, its occurrences, etc. He had come last from a gay

party at the Cleverlys, given to some strangers who had brought letters to them as bankers; and of these and of his acquaintances who were present, he gave sketches with his usual graphic power, and of the festivities and what he had seen ludicrous or beautiful. The town clock struck one, as he came to a pause in his descriptions; and his startled mother, rising and taking his forehead between her hands, impressed a good-night kiss upon it, with a murmured "God bless you," reminded him of his need of rest, and passed out at the noiselessly opened door. But there was a door shut upon her, at that same moment, which she knew not of—a withheld confidence in her son's heart—the first thought that had ever faltered before her searching eyes, but which had just now been refused utterance at his lips, though he scarce knew why—and, to a far-reaching turn of his life, and to much that by even his mother was never wholly understood, and by others wholly misinterpreted, that unvoiced emotion was the key.

CHAPTER II.

THE Cleverlys' was the house, on his visiting list, where Paul was most at home. Phil. Cleverly, the eldest son, was a college friend and intimate ally. An introduction to the strangers for whom the party had been made, that evening, and of the cordial kind which would ensure full attention, would be a matter of course; and it was with curiosity on the alert and his best manners in readiness, that Paul walked through the rooms with his friend's mother leaning on his arm, and awaited the opportunity to be presented.

A visit to their friends who were in office in Canada had brought the family of Ashlys across the water. They were prolonging their trip by a look at "the States," and were to be out of England only for the summer. It was understood that, though the gentleman was simple Mr. Ashly, he was of that class of ancient families who would be demeaned by accepting a title—the wealth and gentle blood having been longer in the line of their

descent than in that of most of the present nobility. His letters had introduced him, of course, to the principal official persons in the different cities, and a knot of Boston gentlemen of whom something specific could thus be said, were now gathered around Mr. and Mrs. Ashly, exchanging with them the civilities of new acquaintance.

But there was a Miss Ashly—a young lady apparently of nineteen or twenty—who, leaving the party of dignitaries around her father and mother, had strolled off to the conservatory at the end of the long suite of apartments, and stood in the dimmer light of its fragrant atmosphere, examining one among the multitude of exotics there in bloom. She was of slight and graceful figure, rather tall, and, except that she was particularly quiet and deliberate in her movements—walking and looking, indeed, as if she felt entirely alone in the room—Paul saw nothing to distinguish her, at the first glance.

The opportunity to present her young friend was seen at once by Mrs. Cleverly.

“Miss Ashly!” she said, approaching her, and phrasing her introduction with a demolition of ceremony at which she was usually very successful, “this young gentleman (allow me to present him to you—Mr. Fane), is our walking dictionary of beautiful things, and will tell you the names of any flowers you may not recognise.”

Miss Ashly bowed very quietly.

"Will you excuse me," continued Mrs. Cleverly, "if I commission him to do the honors of my conservatory, while I look up some music for my other guests? Paul! you will not forget to show Miss Ashly my new South American plant, farther on."

And, with this groundwork of conversation provided, left quite alone with the fair stranger, his presentment flattering, and the surroundings particularly inspiring and beautiful, Paul's task of making himself agreeable seemed not very difficult.

The history of the plant in question was very smoothly entered upon. Miss Ashly followed to the vase over whose lip it threw its flowers, heavy and gorgeous, and they examined together the encouragement to luxury which Nature seemed to give in so mere a prodigality of beauty. The transition from this to other topics was easy; for Paul was, of course, at home, as to the associations around them, and the young lady was too thoroughly at home in her own self-possession to have an awkwardness, either from silence or abruptness, any way probable. They talked away, for a half hour, in the conservatory, apparently as any other two people might—and, to her, if she had thought about it at all, exactly as any two indifferent strangers, who were pretty sure never to meet again, were likely to do.

"Mildred, my dear!" said a voice from the other room—Mr. Ashly the next moment appearing and beckoning to his daughter.

She half turned to Paul, after a step toward her father, as if she had nearly forgotten even to take leave of her new acquaintance, thus ending an interview that was to change the whole current of life, for *him*, while, for *her*, it was but the touch of the swallow's wing to the calm surface of the lake.

The summons, by Mr. Ashly, was to some music in the reception-room, which was promised to be worth the hearing—but Paul turned back into the conservatory, and, following the marble floor to the balcony at the end, stepped out into the moonlight. There was a new, strange feeling in his bosom, with which he wished to be alone.

He began by shutting out, with a half-conscious resentment of thought, the accustomed softness of the summer night—out of harmony, somehow, for once—and then proceeded to call the last half hour rigidly to account.

It was not her beauty; he knew a hundred women more beautiful. Her features were even plain, as he came to recall them. Was there any especial grace or queenliness in her manner? No; she was quite inelegant, he thought, in the management of her hands; and, with that forward bend of her neck and half neglectful indolence of gait, her impression upon most persons would be anything but

imposing. The large grey eye—it was fine, certainly, with its motionless cloud of dark uplifted lashes that seemed never to close, but—

Paul tightened his lips, and concentrated mind and memory on that feature of Miss Ashly's.

——Yes! something had flashed upon his consciousness as that cold grey eye rested on his face—a something that had never fallen on him from a human look before—yet so evasive and unreal, though his whole soul was up in arms with it, that, with all his effort, he could neither define nor confront it. She had become a creature of intense interest to him, but it was no beginning, ever so remote, of a passion. There was more distaste than love in his sentiment towards her. Yet to know her better—to understand *that look*, and find the plummet that would sound the depths to which it had reached—this seemed now the troubled fever, before the sudden thirst of which all other feelings were inexplicably swept away.

Unfitted for the gayety within, and unwilling to see any one with whom he must exchange indifferent words that night, Paul stepped from the balcony into the garden below, and without taking leave of his friends, made his way homeward.

The usual happiness of a talk with his mother had a constraint in it for once, as has been already described; but, that over, he turned his key, and, with the new

thought that he must master before sleeping, he was glad to be alone.

To those who have not looked back and wondered at the intangible slughtness of first motive, and who have not found, by trial, how impossible it is, with the coarse woof of words, to portray the cobweb thread of which the most enduring motives are sometimes woven, it will be difficult to make the solution of the mystery thus far entangled, seem at all satis'actory. The daylight that looked in upon Paul's sleepless eyes the next morning, however, brought with it, for him, a shape and semblance for his new thought, which, though he still wondered at its power, was sufficient for recognition, and future analysis and study; and of this we may give a hint in our present chapter, trusting to the progress of our story to make it clearer as we go.

The life of our hero, hitherto, had been passed in a circle of very vague social distinctions. With a personal presence and manners better than his family circumstances, a nature of large hope and confidence, and unusually quick tact and adaptability, he had been everywhere an unquestioned favorite, and the possibility of a society to which he should not be promptly welcomed, or in which he might not find it easy to please, had never occurred to him. With the "best people," by the world's estimate, and the best by the preferences of his own taste, equally ready to sympa-

thize with and esteem him, the thought of levels of life unattainable—human passions out of reach of his awakening and sharing—was as distant as the thought of an angel society for which he needed the aristocracy of wings. To his main ambition, the Art in which he determined to be a master (and of his career in which, this story, be it understood, traces only a side-current, else unexplained), the broad channel of his mind, till now, had been left clear and open.

But now had been first felt the new impulse to the tide through heart and brain. Without insult—without contempt—without intended slight—that cold gray eye had passed over his face *with no recognition of him as an equal*. It was the first human look (and from a woman too!) in which that indefinable acknowledgment—that vague something as habitually expected as heat with sunshine, and as unthought of separately till held back—had been ever wanting. It was not resentment he felt, for she was a passing stranger, whom he had only thought to amuse for the half hour, and whom there was no probability of his ever meeting again. It was not his pride that was wounded (now that he thought of it—though it was that doubtless which had at first so wildly taken the alarm), for his consciousness of superiority in undeveloped genius—a superiority she had no time or means to recognise—put that sensitiveness promptly to rest. It was quite another feeling

which stood fixed, like a mountain-peak, as the clouds and darkness of the storm of the past night fled before the calm light of the morning.

Was he of coarser clay than some other human beings? Were there classes on this planet between whom and himself, by better blood or by long-accumulating culture and refinements, there had gradually widened a chasm, now, even by instinct impassable? Were there women who, under no circumstances, could possibly have loved him—men who by born superiority of quality, were insurmountably out of reach of his fellowship and friendship? Had he lived a blind mole in his home, wholly mistaken in his estimates of those around him—of his mother, whom he had believed next downward from an angel, and of one other (of whom he scarce dared trust himself to think, in connection with this new thought), Mary, his genius love, his mind-idol, to whom, besides his mother, he had alone breathed of his inspirations and aspirations hitherto?

It was by these questions that he felt he was now possessed. The thirst to know his relative rank of nature—to gauge his comparative human claim to respect and affection—to measure himself by his own jealous standard, with those whom he should find first in the world's most established appreciation—was now like a fever in his blood. The temptation to travel, hitherto, had been only for the artistic errand in foreign countries. It had been a passive

day-dream only. He had looked upon it as a pleasant probability, but a pleasure which he could easily defer very long, or forego altogether. He had even argued, indeed, that success in Art would be prouder and worthier if won wholly at home—the birth, growth, and culture of what genius he might have, thus made American only. But travel had another charm, now. A closer view of what was rarest and proudest in older countries promised something beside scholarship in Art. All was confused as yet—his whole soul troubled and perplexed with wants and difficulties—but high above all his weary thoughts, as he flung himself on his bed, after looking out upon the sunrise that morning, was the new spell of that golden East—the beckoning finger of a new want calling him irresistibly to the far lands that lay beyond.

CHAPTER III.

It was not without a slight heightening of color that Paul met the calm eye of Mary Evenden, that afternoon. She sat at the parsonage window, as usual, waiting his coming, and wiling the time with her drawing-book and pencil, and his first impulse—her hand left so confidingly in his, while he seated himself at her side—was to avow that he had something critical to confess, bespeaking, however, her kind suspension of judgment, till he could modify her inevitable first impression.

He began with the utterance of her beautiful name—hesitated—stammered. No! he must turn his thought over, and present it differently. It was, somehow, difficult to find words in which what he had to say would seem worthy to follow after that sainted name—Mary!

As he looked at her face again, it occurred to him that he was about to confess to at least a curiosity as to whether there might not be finer clay than she—a thirst to know whether he had yet seen Nature's best—herself

included in the misgiving disparagement of what he already knew.

“Get bonnet and shawl, and come out for a walk,” he abruptly proposed, after a moment more of vain entanglement and hesitation, “my thoughts are of this world, and you look so superfluously good in this religious little domicil—come !”

But there were drawings to put away, and it would be a minute or two before she would rejoin him at the garden gate, and so he had gained a breathing time to put his confused thoughts into order.

Mary Evenden stood almost in the relation of a sister to young Fane; for, by her own dying mother she had been committed to his, in her early childhood—the invalid condition of her father’s health, making it probable at the time, that she would soon be an orphan. The good clergyman had lingered on, however, though his complete absorption in the overburdening cares of his profession made Mrs. Fane’s guardianship over the daughter, for some years, as complete as if the orphanage had been entire. The separate roof which each child called a home, was, indeed, the only reminder that they were not children of the same mother, their amusements and studies having been mingled entirely, up to Paul’s departure for college; and the return to intimacy in his vacations, and now that

he was graduated, being as simply free and frank as if the tie of blood were between them.

It was a peculiar friendship, however. Though the possibility of love had not given the alarm to either heart, as yet, and no word or look, such as lovers use, had startled or embarrassed them, they were conscious of being sacredly dear to each other—the link, whatever it might be, all the more pure and precious that it had never been named nor measured. Paul had a favorite theory of two or more souls inhabiting one body, and it was mainly fed and strengthened by the perfectly single-hearted exclusiveness with which Mary Evenden maintained a recognition only of his inner nature—a nature which, though he felt conscious it was his truer and stronger self, was not at all seen into by many who knew him otherwise well. To her and to his mother he was veritably one manner of man, and to his common acquaintances he was just as veritably another; and the two, separately described, would hardly have been thought reconcilable. It was Paul's riddle of human nature—not that he was in any way contradictory or other than single-minded to himself; but that, with daily conduct and manners as studiously truthful and natural as he could jealously and almost resentfully make them, he was to different eyes still so different.

There was no denying, Paul confessed himself now, how-

ever, that the temptation to a first insincerity was very strong. He was trying the strength of the temptation with rather a wilful perversity, when Mary stepped from the low threshold of the parsonage. Why tell her of *all* the motive he might have for an errand to foreign lands?

But another claim for his new problem seemed to present itself as he looked upon the form that came towards him.

Paul had often tried in vain to define the artistic charm which there lay in Mary Evenden's beauty. Its effect fell upon the eye only in surprises—revealable, apparently, only to the after look, when common standards had been first put aside—but of that beauty, it now seemed to him that he might reasonably wish to know the comparative rarity and value. The tempter had gone down into the unlighted corner of his heart for the apology that he needed!

More critically than ever before, he studied the air and movement of the unconscious girl during that moment of approach. It was the first trial of the new assay with which, he had now become aware, Nature's coinage must be tested. The reading of the clear stamp on the face and form before him was easy. He knew it better than it could ever be learned by another eye. But there were standards of which his imagination was tremblingly foreshadowing the demands for beauty of noble presence. Was this different beauty there? The simple and yet faultless *pose* of

her neck, assuming nothing and yet bearing up the head with such tranquil dignity—that unalarmed innocence of open eye—the mist-like abandonment of motion, yet every footfall so indefinably modest—the smile that was not reluctant, but had well nigh been too late for the thought by not remembering itself as of any value—form and limb so luxuriantly complete, so venturesomely full, yet over the fruitlike ripeness of which there was such an overrule of a consciousness intellectual only—the white dress falling so gracefully from her tall figure, and her straw hat so primitively plain, and the massive blonde braid wound round from either temple with sculpture-like severity of line—no ornament save the half-blown rose whose stem was slipped through her girdle—simple Mary Evenden—would she be thought beautiful in a palace?

By tacit agreement, the topic on which the interest promised to be unusual was let alone till they should be off sidewalks; and the conversation (with no knowledge on Mary's part, of anything that should embarrass it) kept its accustomed easy flow for some time after reaching the noble shadows of the Mall. Easily as it flowed, it was communing of which Paul did not yet know the value. Her habitual happiness was to mirror his inner nature; and their intercourse, long and well as they had known each other, was the exchange of thoughts and sympathies on ground only where he was earnest and gifted. With his

genius strengthening and demanding, each day, more and more recognition and encouragement, her eagerness for exchange with the pure ore of his mind had wonderfully aided in melting out and coining it; though, so ready and instinctive had been this rare and precious reciprocity, that each seemed to the other to be imparting that which was easiest and most natural. Nor was Paul aware, either, that, by the sufficing of Mary Evenden and his mother for these more sacred sympathies, he was insensibly keeping his inner nature for their loving and sharing only—the more volatile and worldly qualities of his character being, by mere rotation of mood, the change of weapons and armor, with which he went out for his lighter skirmishings with the world.

As Paul coaxed up his unwilling confession once more to the light, he forgot that he had looked at the matter only from his somewhat culprit point of view. To Mary, his proposition to go abroad—particularly if he should withhold from her the new and more worldly motive which was now superadded to his purposes of Art—would be but a leaning toward the bent of her own constant counsel. He had his other advisers, as to a career in life, and they were mostly kind friends who were prepared to second their views by holding out to him the handles of opportunity. For either mercantile or professional success, indeed, nothing seemed wanting but his acceptance of one or the

other of these opportunities, and the easy use of his evident tact and ability. To these advisers, of course (as to his father, whose friends they also were), his devoted application to so unprofitable a pursuit as the pencil, was wholly unknown. And such tempters from without were not likely to be wholly unlistened to! They came with the sounding trumpets of "Enterprise" and "Ambition," and they had pleaders in his energetic health, his strong will, his pride of manhood—one other pleader, too, in the promise of an earlier competency to share with one whom he might love.

But Mary's unworldly eye saw only his genius for Art. To develop his intense love for the Beautiful, seemed to her his proper destiny. Better a more slender livelihood, the daily industry of which should ennoble heart and mind (thought Mary), than larger wealth, the struggle for the acquisition of which must demean the intellect, and leave Nature's best gifts without culture. Art, to her, was a lofty walk with such spirits as Raphael for guide and company; and all other successes in life were, to those of genius, poor and secondary. She had read with Paul, on these subjects till both their minds were artistic in taste and enthusiasm. Without his skill of hand; and the fine intuition of form and color, which constituted his peculiarity of genius, she had done her best to discipline her judgment by assiduous practice in drawing, and she was,

at least, an entire appreciator of what he did, and a charming encourager of his every effort and victory.

"Well?" said Mary, looking up with an inquiring smile, after a few minutes of silence, and thus reminding Paul of the something he had to say.

His magnanimity sprang to the throne with a bound, at the liberal and confiding nobleness of that look and smile. How could he conceal from such a soul-mirror, the remotest impulse of so important a step? He would not!

"Mary," he said, "I have resolved, at last, to go to Europe."

She started, and drew his arm closer to her side.

"But that is not all," he continued. "I wish to make a fair confession to you of all the mystery of this new determination—what awoke it, and what is involved in it."

He hesitated a moment, and Mary, who had stopped and resumed her walk, took the opportunity to come in with what she thought was the encouraging word critically needed to confirm a great resolution.

"The very sunshine without which your genius must languish, my dear Paul," she said, in a low, strong, steady tone. "I am so glad you give up, at last, that misplaced Americanism of trying to be an artist here. You need the air of Italy—the collision with other schools of artists—"

"But, Mary—"

"No, I will not listen to any qualification of so good a resolve! Go, my dear friend—go—"

But the last syllable trembled on her lip, and the flecked light through the overshadowing elms flashed on a sudden brightness in the large blue eye of which he half caught a glimpse as she turned away. There was more than mere expediency to be felt and thought of, in the discussion of that new resolve!

But a familiar call suddenly startled them.

"My children!" said the loving voice of Mrs. Fane, who, as they walked slowly along the Mall, had entered from a side street and overtaken them, "shall I interrupt your downcast eyes in their study of those broken shadows, if I take Paul's other arm? I am tired, and quite need its kind support."

And, with that chance interruption, Paul's confession sank back into silence—to be resummoned and honestly achieved to the satisfaction of his conscience, but not till days had elapsed, and not till the life-long passion for Art had again found its supremacy and become the absorbing and main interest of his plans. Strong and keen motive as his new pride-thirst of social curiosity still continued to be, it fell to its secondary and subordinate place; and, when avowed to Mary, it seemed to her but a side-interest of travel, incidental to his youth and sex. With her broad and unselfish appreciation, the new knowledge he thus

wished was included in the outline of Taste, and accredited to the larger want and more instinctive completeness of his Nature. Paul had his misgiving as to receiving all of this generous estimate. But he marked the mental reservation with a tear of grateful tenderness at his heart, and a prayer for strength to be even what he was thought to be.

The addition, to their company, of one so intimate with both, did not change the topic that afternoon. With the interrupted confession set aside, the project itself of foreign travel was at once imparted to the loving and beloved mother. She received it sadly, thoughtfully, but assentingly. With less youthful elasticity of hope than Mary, the mournful certainties of separation and dread possibilities of harm and unforeseen trial in absence, pressed first on her busy heart and brain.

That was an evening crowded with the undramatic trials of home differences of opinion, and questions of means and future resources. With Mr. Fane's unwavering justice and truth, his severity and practical angularity of judgment had always been borne with, hitherto, and till this unexpected proposition, by his son, no wish or decision of the father had ever needed to be openly opposed. By this calm dissent, known well to be wholly inflexible, Paul's future separation of interest and support was to commence with his departure from the paternal roof. This was expected and unargued. The respectfully dispassionate expression, by

Mrs. Fane, of a regret at his difference of opinion, softened his departure from the room as he left for his evening walk, and the mother and son together once more, laid their plans for the future. She had, happily, a small income of her own, which, with close management and economy, might suffice for his mere wants, till he should find resources in the productions of his genius, and, with this assured, the new path might at least be entered upon. It was a late hour when they parted that night, at his study-door.

And with these moving-springs of our hero's character and outset placed in the reader's hand, he is ready for the more active movement of our story.

CHAPTER IV.

INTENDING, with this chapter, to have taken a single flying leap to the fair city of Florence, and there (with the omission of a year in our story) to commence the history of our hero's adventures in Europe, we found a difficulty—unable to alight, that is to say within any very close neighborhood of Mr. Paul Fane, at Florence, without jostling a gentleman, who was, then and there, the sole sharer of the secrets of his domestic life, and to whose familiar acquaintance the reader would thus be too precipitately introduced. With the imagination so kindly intrusted to us while your eye rests upon this page, dear reader, it is due, by the courtesy of narrative, that we should prepare you for any so full-blown intimacy by some little confidential “aside.”

To go back then, for a little personal information as to the history of the gentleman to be introduced to you.

On entering college (five or six years previous to present date) Paul had obediently taken the “room-mate”

assigned to him by "The Faculty," and had thus found himself in sudden and bivalve familiarity with an equally astonished young gentleman from Indiana. As a means of neutralizing the sectional prejudices with which the students were apt to get clannish and hostile, Freshmen from opposite parts of the country were thus coupled as inmates.

Mr. Wabash Blivins was a "hoosier" of fifteen years of age, whose father was an enterprising captain on the Western waters, and who was patriotically named after the river at the mouth of which the "Star-spangled Banner," his father's lumber-craft, was tied up (Mrs. Blivins being on board) to have him born. He had not been long in college before his overpowering first name was reduced by his classmates to the affectionate diminutive of "Bosh;" and by that (like the sweet iteration in "Will Shakespeare," and "Ben Jonson") he is now on his way to posterity.

With "Bosh Blivins" for a room-mate, Paul was not, at first, very particularly pleased. His manners, though based on heroic principles, were, as yet, matters of very general outline, the particulars to be filled in, according to individual need and circumstances. He would "pitch into" any Sophomore who tried a trick upon his slenderer room-mate, for instance, but he could not be made to understand the relative privacies of boots and hair-brushes.

Then he mortified Paul, in their daily promenades to the Post-office, by his hoosier habit of resting—squatting flat upon his heels, if his friend stopped to speak to a lady or look in at a shop window, and with his arms hung collapsedly over his knees, sitting motionless in this Western attitude of repose, till called to go on again. His vital electricity, also, had the Western peculiarity of becoming vocal with excitement. In his backwoods early education poetry had not chanced to fall much in his way, and now, as he sat up late at night, very much worked upon by Byron and Tom Moore, his various utterances of emotion at the exciting passages—whistling, squealing, howling, or yelling, according to the sentiment to be sympathized with—was very disturbing to Paul's slumbers. For one of these hoosier yells, given with fearful suddenness at an eloquent climax in the Tutor's prayer, during a period of religious excitement in the college, Bosh was threatened with rustication.

In addition to point-blank differences of habit and manner on such points, the Westerner and Down-Easter were diametrically opposite in some qualities of character. Paul was an absorbent—eager only to receive the magnetism of other minds, and expressing himself always with modest deference; Blivins was a demonstrative—eager only to impress, and saying all he meant, if not considerably more. Then, while Paul had a very keen sense of the

ludicrous, habitually moderating his own language and manners by his knowledge of laugh-shot distance, Blivins was sublimely safe among his superlatives, and, though ready enough for broad fun when explained to him, wholly without natural recognition of that element in the intellectual atmosphere, and blissfully unconscious of being by any possibility in danger of ridicule himself.

It is not unlikely, that, in the very contradiction of the two characters, lay half the secret of the friendship that soon grew up between them; but they had some strong qualities in common, besides, and, after rooming together for the Freshman year, they were more than content to send in their names as "chums" *in perpetuum*. And so, for Sophomore year, Fane and Blivins hooked arms and vicissitudes.

But, toward the end of this second year, an active principle of Blivins' character began to get uneasy. Stilted as he certainly was on most subjects, he had the most flat footed downrightness of perception as to "what would pay." He had taken a cool look at the two upper classes of students in their third and fourth years, and made up his mind that the difference between them and him wasn't quite worth waiting so long for. "College life might be very well for slow folks, but it was a one-horse affair, and he was a whole team." "Sophomore, perhaps—but he was seventeen years old, and had cut his eye-teeth." "Latin

and Greek don't sell." "Time a boy like him was making money." And with deductions like these, drawn from his long arguments with Paul, Blivins brought his college education to a close with the end of the Sophomore year, and was off for what he called a "faster place," his native Indiana.

With no capital except sanguine for one, Bosh's first pick of customers for his imaginative goods was of course somewhat experimental, and, after various unsuccessful trials of the different professions, he found himself, in the second year after parting with Paul, profiting by some taste he had caught, and some little instructions he had received from his room-mate in his favorite occupation of drawing. He had become scene-painter to a dramatic company who had a floating theatre in a flat-boat on the Mississippi. With his hand thus got in, he looked around for what was wanted in that line, and soon found that such patriotic or pious pictures as he could paint—say two per week, more or less—found a ready sale. This "opened up." He worked at it a while, till the demand came in faster than he could finish off, and he then raised his prices, and began to think of fame. Italy was a country where he could work cheaper, and, at any rate, a better place for his pictures to hail from. To make sure, however, he began with a tour through the back settlements; and, calling on the religious farmers and leading politicians,

he procured commissions for such subjects as they severally preferred, established an agency in Cincinnati, and so organized his market. And, by due return of the merchantmen with cargoes of oil and wine from Leghorn, came home scores of Blivins' masterpieces from Florence, which stood, splendid witnesses of republican appreciation of native talent, on the mantel-pieces of the glorious West.

CHAPTER V.

IN the back wing of one of the old half-ruined palaces under the Eastern wall of Florence—(the once splendid home of one of the decayed Tuscan nobility, but now, like others in its unfashionable neighborhood, rented for mere pittance of rent to the painters and sculptors who needed the favoring light of the tall windows and lofty ceilings)—in the north corner of the Palazzo F——, on a still, mellow morning of April, 1832, two artists, busy with color and pencil, stood before their respective easels, in the same room. They were in opposite corners, on either side of the only unshuttered window, and, upon a raised platform on the other side of the large apartment, with a flood of the golden light of that beautiful sky pouring down upon her nude shoulders and loosened locks, knelt the female

model, of whom they were each making a study for a picture. The girl's mother, who accompanied her always, sat knitting on a low chair near by, and in the sketch on one of the easels, the picturesque head and figure of the elder female were very strikingly included.

"Ten cents an hour, and the mother thrown in, is what I call moderate damages," said Blivins, putting a wrinkle into the forehead under his hand with a single dash of his brush, "but I don't intend to swindle the old woman. It's a Bible Sarah I want, and she isn't quite used-up enough to justify my Abraham, as it were. I have to imagine the flesh-flats at low water, and the tear-troughs and cavings-in. But her daughter is a slap-up Hagar and no mistake, and if I get a good picture out of the old cow and her pretty heifer, why, I'll behave handsomely, and fork over the consideration."

"Right, and fair, my dear Bosh," said Paul, "though Giulietta's 'ten cents an hour' is for letting *one* pair of eyes drink of her beauty, and there are *two* of us having that pleasure. So, she is entitled to double wages on her own account, and the mother's extra into the bargain. But come, see what a charming Psyche she makes!—the same head you have made into that pork-fed looking Hagar of yours, you awful aggravator!"

Blivins stood half way between the two pictures, looking first at his strapping Hagar receiving her doom of exile

from old Sarah, at the door of Abraham's tent, and then at the timid Psyche just venturing, with her half-shaded lamp, upon the slumber of the yet unseen Cupid.

"Not much like pictures of the same woman, that's a fact," he said, after a moment of musing; "and there's a likeness of the girl in yours, too—but it's mine that looks as most people like to have their women look"—

"But why not paint what they *ought* to like, and so help people to better taste?" interrupted Paul, who kept up a daily hammering upon Bosh's exaggerations of fancy. "Look at that girl, now!"

And, as he spoke, Giulietta, taking advantage of the unoccupied moment for a change of posture, rose and walked dreamily about the room, her exquisitely rounded arms folded across her undraped bust—superbly lovely, and yet as innocently unconscious of the exposure from her waist upwards as a nymph in marble.

"What could be more ethereal and pure? And yet your Hagar, there, looks anything but proper, with all that flesh and color, my dear Bosh!"

"I don't doubt you are entirely unanimous in thinking so," said Bosh, with a tone of injured mournfulness, "but most folks prefer lips with a landing-place to 'em, and something to make fast to, here and there. That moon-shine woman of yours wouldn't do for *my* customers, Mr. Paul! Did I ever tell you who my Hagar is to stand for?"

"No," said his friend, who had resumed his study of Giulietta; and Paul went on sketching, while Blivins, with his attention mostly occupied with his work, entered upon a careless and interrupted narrative of one of his Western experiences—showing the good influence of criticism, however, by shading away, as he talked, some of the superfluous plumptitude of his Hagar.

"Wall, you see, I was drifting round through the back settlements in Michigan, on a propagation of the Fine Arts—getting commissions, that is to say, to come out here. * * * But people don't buy pictures very spontaneously, particularly if they haven't seen 'em; and it took 'soft sodder' to start the subject, and then it had to be piety or politics where you put in your persuader; or perhaps something curious had happened to themselves, or, with a sharp look out, the weak spot would turn up, and you might stand a picture on that. It was tight electioneering, though, and I could go to Congress with half the steam. * * * Come to a river one night, horseback; I found I was close by the diggings of Deacon Superior Nash, and he and my old gentleman had lumbered together, and so I reckoned I'd got a picture on to him. * * * Horse put up—all right—nobody at home but the Deacon—and, to talking we went, over cider and sausages." * * *

"Topics, pork and lumber, I suppose," said Paul, breaking the silence, while Bosh became abstracted for a minute

or two in gazing at a new turn of the light upon the superb shoulders of Giulietta.

"No," continued Blivins, "I got him confidential by the third or fourth mug, and then he began telling about his wives."

"But the Abraham that is to serve for his likeness, there, had two wives at a time," suggested Fane.

"So had the Deacon," pursued Bosh, "and there lay my high water for business. He told me the whole story—too long to go over now—but I saw my opportunity, and put in at the right place. 'Just like Abraham and Hagar,' says I, and it hit him exactly on the raw. His first wife was a high-pressure old spitfire, and he had compassed Heaven and Michigan, lobby and Legislature, to get a divorce from her. * * * At last he thought he had it. * * * Rafting-time came round, and he went down stream with a mile of lumber, calm and comfortable. * * * Well, the Deacon made a good sell at New Orleans, smarted up, and started for home. But the thought of the old woman still troubled him, and on the way he married another woman, to take the taste out of his mouth."

"Then it was his *Sarah* driven into the wilderness, not his *Hagar*," observed Paul.

"No, no; back water, if you please! He hadn't yet got his papers, and the old woman managed to slip her foot

out of the trap while he was away. So he had hardly got home and held the first prayer-meeting in his own house as a bridegroom, when he had to cut loose from his pretty new wife, and begin to pay bills again for the old one."

"Then that robustious young woman you have been painting there, went home somewhat *a-Miss?*" said Paul.

"A miss and nothing else," assented Blivins, who did not see the pun.

"And so, Giulietta, my dear," said Paul with a tone of compassion, as he walked across the room to lay away one of the waves of raven hair that was hiding the arch of her beautiful throat, "you are not to be Mrs. Deacon Nash, after all!"

"*Signore!*" murmured the half couchant peasant-girl, on hearing her name—but with a look of tender earnestness in her large dark eyes, though she got no answer, which showed that the voice and manner of Paul even in a strange language, were very sweet to hear.

"But Giulietta is to hang up in the Deacon's parlor for the Mrs. Nash that *was to be*," continued Bosh, "and very happy the old Deacon was, to find that Hagar in Genesis had just such a time of it as his poor girl, and that he himself was no worse off than Abraham, after all. He'll think it a pity that his live Mrs. Hagar Nash can't get

into his house and stay there, as peaceably as my painted one will, that's all."

"And which do you think would be the happier, Bosh—Giulietta as Mrs. Deacon Nash, or Mrs. Deacon Nash as Giulietta?"

Blivins, for once in a way, gave a loud laugh.

"Well, I *think* I see the wife of a Michigan Deacon showing herself round for ten cents an hour—even if her mother went along! Rather low water for Captain Nash's family to drift in, Mr. Paul!"

"But, persisted Fane, who was beginning to have his own ideas about comparative happiness, "do you think Giulietta would be happier and more innocent if she could change places even with Mrs. Sarah Nash?"

"Why," said Bosh, rather dodging the point in dispute, "the Deacon will, like as not, be Governor of Michigan?"

"But look at that face, my popular Blivins! Every line of it, spite of her un-republican industry, has the repose of completely untroubled happiness. Giulietta has never had an illness, never had a care. I have seen where they live, in the valley just over Fiesole, and, with what Italian I had picked up and added to my Latin, I managed, the other day, to hear their whole story. She has bed-ridden grand-parents and a troop of young brothers and sisters—her father unable to get half a livelihood for them.

But they bless the Holy Virgin, night and morning, that the eldest daughter, Giulietta, was born beautiful and symmetrical enough to be a model to the artists. She commenced at ten years of age, sitting to the sculptors for their cherubs and cupids, and has supported her mother's family ever since, in comfort and happiness, with a profession which, in her rank of life, while conducted properly, is both respected and envied."

"All very well, out here," Blivins partly knocked under, by saying, as Paul took breath, "but it'll be a long time before they'll turn it to account that way, if a girl is born handsome out West!"

"Yet here and there a Western beauty, I fancy, would like to be the type, as Giulietta is, of many a work of genius—copied, idealized, immortalized, on canvas and in marble—studied and worshipped, daily and all day, by the eyes in the world that best know how to reverence and prize what, in her beauty, God has made admirable."

"You're putting it strong, Paul," said Bosh, giving more eyes than before, however, to the beauty that was so discoursed upon, "for I don't believe Giulietta cares a fig what the artists copy, or what they think while they're doing it."

"*Mezzo giorno, Signori*," said the mother, rising, as the convent bell rang for noon, and so interrupting the argument with the announcement of the close of the hour.

And Giulietta stepped from the platform and drew up

the shoulder-straps of the coarse petticoat that had fallen around her hips, twisted her heavy masses of long raven hair into a knot, and, with her mantle drawn modestly around her faultless form, and her straw hat gracefully set upon her nymph-like head, courtesied her "*Addio*," and gave a last sweet smile to Paul.

And, as they set back their easels for that day, both artists wished it were the time to-morrow when she would come again.



CHAPTER VI.

THE reader is not aware, perhaps, that he was let into a secret, in the last chapter, by the description there given of Blivins' studio, and of his and his friend Fane's artistic morning with the fair model, Giulietta. There will hardly be a fair understanding of the footing of these two gentlemen in Florence, without a pause in our story while we explain—though, how real life, which does not pause for such explanations, manages to get understood at all, is a doubtfulness which you have only to write a true tale to grow charitable upon.

Of course we should prefer to proceed, as we were about to do, and finish the story of that day by a description of

our friends' disposal of their evening—Bosh being engaged to dine with the Fitz-Firkins, the wealthy American family resident at Florence, and Paul going to a Court ball at the Pitti—but, as they both followed the custom of the country and took the afternoon nap (which goes by the pretty name of “*la siesta*”), we have an interval of time, for which, { without violation of probability, our story may leave them by themselves.

And now, then, to explain why this studio, and the daily labors upon its two very different easels, in a half-ruined and forgotten old plazzo of the City of Art, formed a part of the daily life of our two friends, which they kept secret from their respective acquaintances.

On Fane's first arrival at Paris, with a warm letter of introduction from his friend Mrs. Cleverly, to the wife of the American Minister, who chanced to be a special intimate of her own, he had been very kindly received; and, with but time enough to confirm the favorable programme of his mind and manners given in the letter, had been taken under the especial wing of his distinguished lady-consignee, by his appointment as *attaché* to the Legation. By this nominal honor, with neither emoluments nor duties, Paul was put at his ease in the court society of the gay capital; but it involved the necessity, also, that, in accordance with the usual proprieties of the position, he should

appear, in all other respects, a gentleman of leisure. His studies for the main ambition of his life—as an artist—were again, therefore, as at home, put under a chance seal of privacy.

For the secondary object of his visit to Europe—the strong though unconfessed desire to look close upon the world's finer or prouder clay, and know wherein it differed from himself and those he loved—Paul's horoscope seemed most favorably cast. It was with a secret satisfaction which he scarce dared acknowledge to himself, that he accepted the advantage thus held out to him, and with the magic "open sesame" of a diplomatic title on his card, entered upon the dazzling labyrinths of Parisian life, with its world-pick society of the high-born and brilliant. Fortunately for the effect of this giddy intoxication upon his impressible and plastic mind, the correspondence with his mother called him faithfully to account, day by day, before conscience and her calm, sweet eyes; and, in his genius and what it found to appreciate and select in the glitter around him, there was still another pure spirit, unseen but ever silently separative and rejective; and of these influences (the latter more particularly), we may, perhaps, better trust one of his own letters to explain the value. He thus wrote from Paris:—

DEAREST MOTHER :

That little twitch at the lock of hair over my left temple tells me that you are here, just as certainly as when you crept behind me at my easel at home, and by that bell-pull to my abstracted brain, informed me that I was to come out of my picture and attend to you. Spirits can cross oceans and pull hair—I here record my well-founded belief—and you are here, up three flights of stairs, in my private and unapproachable Parisian den waiting to have a talk with your boy. Kiss, dear mother, and begin.

By your last letter you were still doubting my “continued identity under the addition of a court sword,” and, to tell the truth, I am still wondering, occasionally, when I come suddenly upon myself in a mirror at a ball, whether that pendant superfluity and gold collar are *me* ! I have swallowed, with some difficulty, gulp by gulp, the daily dishonesty of laying aside the maul-stick of the artist (which I *am*) and going out into the world decked with the weapons of a cavalier (which I *am not*). So silly to wear a sword to a party at all, but particularly without the slightest idea of how to use it if it were drawn ! But we soon agree with the world if we find it admiring us, even for an absurdity, and so I follow my sword about, most of the time ; letting it make way for me if it will, and asking no questions. Small-clothes and silk stockings, too ! But I will spare you the lesser particulars.

My pencil achieves little at present, I am free to own, and, between “late hours” and early engagements, my good-boy quotidian of application is shortened at both ends ; but I think you mistake, dearest mother, in fancying the time altogether lost which is given to the “gay and giddy world,” even by the artist. Fashion, though it has a bad name, is the customer of genius, and

enlists many a pure spirit of beauty in its service of pleasure-making. Take away but the wickedness that walks unseen in these lighted rooms, and they would be fit places to entertain angels. And it is not merely that there are pictures and statuary which wealth alone could buy, but the beauty of woman (though you need not tell this to Mary), seems to me artistically elevated by the wondrous art often shown in its embellishment—made more sacred, I may even say, by the costliness that seems so to enshrine and fence it in. A jewel of great price has great splendor, and a rare flower is the more curious and far-sought work of God—and such gem or flower, well worn by the proud and high-born beauty, has the effect (on my new eyes, at least) of a choice seal or more precious cipher placed on the wearer to mark Nature's best.

Then these people who "fritter away life," "turn day into night," indulge in "wasteful extravagance," and are, in fact, the very Pharaohs and Pharisees whom good Dr. Evenden preaches into the Red Sea, and a still warmer place with such heavenly-minded perseverance—why, dear mother, they do not look so bad when you come close to them! Of course the palaces and grand houses where all the "pomp and vainglory" is to be found, are the Doctor's "Sodom and Gomorrah"—but, to my surprise, the manners are simpler in such places than in the Doctor's own congregation; and the voices are more meditative and gentle; and the postures, walk and conversation (if my artistic sense of propriety as well as taste, is to be trusted at all), are, in their well-studied humility and well-bred unassumingness and simplicity, more suitable for any reasonable "Zion." "Satan in disguise," very possibly—but may I not admire, with suitable precaution (or, till there is some smell of brimstone in the air), what I thus find purest in taste and seeming?

One thing I should insist on your recognising and approving, if you were here, my calm-eyed and quiet-mannered mamma!—the character given to the general look and presence of these high-bred Europeans by their air of unconscious *repose*. It may be from the contrast with the more abrupt and nervous constitution of our people at home, but it seems to me a very marked as well as admirable peculiarity of court manners. It affects beauty so much! The *pose* of the head, the turn of the arm, the movement of the person—all governed by nerves that are never taken by surprise, and always deliberately dignified. Then the expression of the features is so artistically improved by it! One look is shaded into another—a smile heralded like a sunrise, by a dawn; a change from gayety to sadness made tenderer by a twilight. Such self-possessed and imperturbable tranquillity of look, manner and movement, I may add, impresses you like a language of peace of mind (deceivingly, as it may interpret the fashionable consciences beneath), and gives a kind of moral superiority to the atmosphere, which is sometimes painfully wanting to the starting, hesitating, uncertain manners of our most exemplary “brethren and sisters.” Please, let me think so, at least, dear mother, and profit by the lesson I draw from it. The “*cælum-que tueri*”—the face of man made to look upward—implies that the human countenance may have a more or less edifying look—does it not?

I have all sorts of acquaintances here, but, as yet, no intimates. After the excitement of an evening in society, the mute presence of genius in these hushed and lofty galleries of Art has a wonderful enchantment. Fortunately the world is too busy or too polite to inquire how one disposes of his spare time, and I safely give to my pencil, or to studies of great pictures, as exclusive and long a morning as I please. It might be different if I had intimacies;

but, as I said before, I have none—my attention, up to the present time, having enough to do to be general only—wholly engrossed, that is to say, with being civil enough to pass muster while I observe merely. There is so much that is new and beautiful on every side, that Curiosity and Appreciation (those two quiet ministering spirits) give one his fill of pleasure. With admirable works of Art and admirable people, therefore, I maintain, at present, pretty much the same relation—receiving great pleasure from what is charming in each, but endeavoring to impress, in turn, neither picture nor gentleman, neither statue nor lady.

My own path in Art is becoming again visible to me, though its faint and far line was entirely lost, at first, in the flood of predominant genius gathered in these splendid galleries. Whether I shall ever have the skill to express the ideal which is daily shaping itself to my inner eyes, I do not know—but, from every masterpiece, as I study it more intently, the *something I should have done differently* separates and stands apart like a phantom, and, to grasp and realize that I feel to be my problem of success. Of course, what I cannot make visible with my pencil, I am still less able to define in words, so I cannot tell you what this style of mine is to be. But I may say that, while it is less animal than what I find to be the most successful ideals, it is not so by any lessening of proportions or development. It is merely that it is made more spiritual by a *consciousness intellectual only*. The body, with all its perfected beauty, is forgotten in the soul. Mary Evenden represents it. She looks as if walking the world with only the spirit-memory of the Heaven she came from—wholly unconscious of the form that she animates and bears about—yet how full and absolute is her beauty as a woman!

Well, dear mother, I have passed the evening with you, and the

midnight, that, to you, three thousand miles away, will be a more tardy visitant, is now at my door. Let it bring you my good-night kiss—though, instead of undressing for dream-land, as with that good-night kiss at home, I must dress presently for a ball. May God preserve me to my mother, and my mother to me! Dear, precious, blessed mother, ever loving and beloved, good-night!

PAUL.

It was three months after the date of this letter that Fane found himself in Florence—his six months in Paris having given him all the knowledge of the gay capital of which he felt he could make conscientious use at that stage of his artistic progress, and his errand to Italy being the need he felt of the apprenticeship to its higher schools, combined with its better facilities for practical study. By the advice of his kind friend, the Minister, however, he had retained his appointment as *attaché*—the diplomatic passport giving him the same privileges at other courts as at Paris—and, on his arrival, he had duly gone through the form of a presentation to the hospitable sovereign of Tuscany, and, with his court position, and the letters he had brought, was very readily at his ease as a supposed traveller for pleasure.

But Florence is a small capital, and the arrangement of means for a very devoted yet still necessarily secret pursuit of his professional studies, seemed to offer, at first, formidable embarrassments to Paul. He had occupied himself

for a week or two in forming acquaintances and visiting the Galleries, his mind very much troubled with plans for which his small resources seemed quite unequal, when he chanced, one evening, to stroll into the *café* of the Piazza Trinita. As usual, this favorite resort of artists and idlers was thronged with guests—the wandering musicians, flower-girls, cigar-venders, and begging monks, all in lively circulation among the crowd—and Paul seated himself at one of the marble tables, dispirited and lonely. He called for his coffee, and sat stirring away at his sugar very thoughtfully, when, carelessly looking up, he encountered a pair of eyes fastened upon him, the owner sitting on the other side of the *café*, in a petrified stare, head and arms thrown back, mouth wide open, and the power of motion, apparently, suspended for the moment by an asphyxia of speechless astonishment.

Paul leaned suddenly forward, and as he shaded his eyes with his hand, the just visible parting of his lips with the inaudible question “Bosh!” expressed his own incredulous amazement at what he saw.

At the same instant there was a yell which all but scalped every musical Italian within half a mile.

“Yahoo! Jehosophat! Don’t hold me! Paul Fane, by all that’s navigable!”

And crouching into a figure 4, like a hard-pushed bear clearing the chasm of a water-course, Blivins started on

an air-line across the *café* to Paul, overturning first the supper on his own round table, and then with a touch-and-go wipe of his foot over the top of the next one, carrying away the coffee and maraschino of a couple of thunder-struck French artists.

The mutual miscellany of limbs and exclamations that the friends went into—for Paul's own recognition of Bosh was a rebound from loneliness and depression, and he had embraced and re-embraced his old room-mate before he thought of the probable impression on those around)—was a spectacle gazed on with apprehensive amazement. They were scarce beginning to sit on two seats, and hear each other speak, however, when the waiters came rushing in with ropes and shutters—the landlord not doubting in the least that Bosh was an escaped madman, and sending instantly for something to tie him to, and prevent further mischief.

The waiters hesitated about taking hold of such a looking customer as Bosh, and, with the time thus gained, Paul settled his disturbed clothes and put on his habitual look of propriety; and, with an apology to the two gentlemen who had been walked over, and an explanation to the landlord that his friend was from the Rocky Mountains and had the precipitate manners of the steep side of the American Continent, he paid the breakages, etc., and walked Bosh off—the track made for them by the distrust-

ful crowd, as they gained the street, being considerably wider than the respect for Bosh's personal presence usually commanded.

It was a happy evening to the two friends. Besides the pleasure of renewing their old intimacy, each happened to supply exactly the most pressing want of the other—Paul's counsel and tutorship in Art being very necessary to Blivins and Blivins's nominal tenantry of a studio, and confidential agency in the procuring of all the belongings of an artist, being the very screen for retired application which Paul was puzzled to contrive.

And, before the sunset of another day, they were domiciled together, their lodgings in a small street running westward from the Piazza Trinita, and their common studio where we have already described it, in a wing of one of the lofty and half-ruined palaces on the unfrequented side of the city. It was an accident favorable to Paul's wishes, also, that Blivins, from some glimmer which his dignity had received of the probable misappreciation of his pictures by his brother artists in Florence, had, after the first week, jealously kept his *sanctum* to himself. No visitor knew the way to it.

And here, in what was nominally Blivins's studio, the two friends gave their mornings uninterruptedly to Art—the manner of disposal of the remaining portions of their time being what the deferred next chapter will now hasten to portray.

CHAPTER VII.

THE sunset was pouring its yellow dust over the streets of Florence, giving a softened and rounded edge to every line of the bold and overladen architecture. Every most careless effect of building or beast of burden—every movement or posture of man, woman or child—seemed the original of a picture of Claude. The air was happiness enough to breathe, without life's being made any richer.

"I will make no engagement for to-morrow morning," said Paul, to his friend Bosh, as they parted at the door of their lodgings; "to a night with such an atmosphere as this, a man can only deliver himself over."

"But, there's Giulietta engaged early," interrupted Bosh; "why not give the night's sleep the go-by, altogether—wind up at the ball with a cup of coffee, and come straight to the studio?"

"Too pure a presence to bring such polluted eyes to," said Paul, thoughtfully. "I would not profane the child by looking upon her beauty without the baptism of sleep, after one of these court balls!"

"Wh—e—w!" incredulously whistled Blivins, to whom this scruple was a trifle too transcendental; "little she'll care whether you've baptized your ten-cent piece, so you pay it! I shall go dine with the Firkinse, without losing any of *my* goodness, as I know of. Giulietta for one, if you're not there, that's all."

The passing *vetturino*, to whom Paul had beckoned, drove up at this moment, and the two friends parted for their different engagements—Blivins to proceed on foot to the splendid "Palazzo Firkin," and Fane directing the driver of the hired vehicle to pass out at the city gate toward San Miniato. He was to take tea with the Palefords, at their vineyard cottage among the neighboring hills, and come in with them to the court ball, at a later hour.

With alternate crawl and scamper, after the fashion of the country, the *vetturino* pursued his way toward Casa F——, and the yellow of the fading sunlight was contending with the silver of a full moon new risen, when they stopped at the rude old gateway.

"Porter or portress, whichever you please, my dear Fane," said Colonel Paleford, stepping out from under the roofed lintel, with his daughter upon his arm, and giving Paul a hand as he alighted, "Sybil and I came down to share the honor of opening the gate for you."

And warmly returning the grasp of the soldierly English-

man, and raising his hat with the most deferential homage as he bowed low to take the proffered hand of the daughter, Paul joined them on their return to the house. The rough vineyard road was lined and roofed over with the luxuriant vines, and as they emerged from the darkened avenue at the end, they came upon the English tea-table spread on the grass in the open air.

"This is rather *al fresco*, for an invalid," said Mrs. Paleford, as she nodded familiarly to Paul, and went on pouring out the tea that had been waiting for them, "but a house, in this climate, is such a different thing! In England it *shuts in* comfort—here, it *shuts it out*."

"So defined in the bird-dictionary," said Paul.

"It was thought to be running such a dreadful gauntlet of exposure, when I started to get to Italy," continued the invalid, "but what would my doctor say, now—quite given over as a consumptive, and yet taking tea out of doors in the evening?"

Paul was seated at the round table, by this time, with one of the younger children upon his knee, and Miss Paleford leaned upon her father's shoulder, looking alternately into his face as he talked, and at the broad disk of the moon as it lifted among the olive-trees beyond. The beautiful girl took little or no part in the conversation, except by a worshipping attention to her father, which

seemed to Paul to partake almost of the character of a fascination.

"I was speculating, only this morning, upon a very contented old cripple at the gate," said the Colonel, "and thinking what a happy country it is, where exclusion and exposure are not among the ills of poverty."

"And where bread and wine may be had at any vineyard gate for the asking," added Paul.

"But it is not merely in the climate and its prodigality of what will sustain life," continued his friend, "but see how much more is free of cost than elsewhere—say of luxuries, and to those who are poor, like us!"

Paul glanced at the lofty impress of feature and manner on the family around him, and admired once more the English-ism of making no secret of reduced circumstances or necessary economy.

"The Duke's galleries are of unheard of cost—so are his gardens—the galleries and gardens of his nobility—yet neither he nor any one of his court is more at liberty to enjoy them than you or I, Fane—and without the cost of a farthing! Then the ball at the Palace to-night, with its lighted wilderness of splendors, its music and feasting—the very preëminence of rank, in the sovereign entertainer, relieving your pride of the embarrassment of receiving such hospitalities without return!"

"But I have thought, even in my own country, where there is less 'luxury gratis' than any where else," said Paul, "that the rich man is often the care-worn manager of the theatre where others enjoy the play."

"Climate has much to do with the pleasure of being rich," the Colonel went musingly on to say, "the consciousness of an empty pocket being very different in a chilly atmosphere or a warm one. Any man in the world, I venture to say, would feel richer on a shilling in Florence, than on a guinea in London. But aside from the fancy of the matter, there is positive reason for wealth being so much more of a blessing in England—the costly shutting out of the climate, that there is to be done before you can begin to be happy. The beggar, here, has what we call 'comfort'—but there must be 'competency' in England, to procure you the house and hearth which would only just enable you to begin where the Italian beggar stands already."

"No beggars in republics, I suppose?" asked the listening Sybil, turning her calm blue eyes from the moon upon Paul, with an effect, in their lustre and in the slow motion which he admiringly likened in his own mind to the priestess-like pouring out of vases-full of moonlight upon a worshipper of Dian. Busy with storing away the chance-gleam of so much beauty in his artistic memory—observing, too, that the earnest study of his voicelessly responsive look had started

the color into the cheek of the reserved girl—Paul did not immediately answer.

“And with no rank in America,” said Mrs. Paleford, “I suppose wealth goes further there than elsewhere, towards making a grandee.”

“It would seem as if it must be so,” replied Paul, and probably would be, but that wealth is brought into less esteem by two or three chance influences, that are also American. In the first place, fortunes are made easily, in our country—often so accidentally or suddenly—that the mere fact of being rich gives no unconditional position. Then wealth is so easily lost, with the venturesome character of our people, and it is so divided up where there is no law of primogeniture, that it is not looked upon as a sufficient permanency to confer any undisputed superiority of one family over another. And there is a third and worse opprobrium under which wealth labors in America—its possession, in the majority of cases, by those to whose children it is a curse. New to it themselves, as most rich people are, and bringing up their families in mere idleness and ostentation, they do not hand down the superiorities of culture in mind and manners which are the accompaniments of inherited wealth elsewhere. The phrase “rich men’s sons” contains a sneer in common parlance, and describes those, who, as a class, are positively offensive.”

“But you have distinctions of society, surely,” said the

Colonel, "and there are such gradations recognized as "first families" and "fashionables." You have people who are allowed to be more of gentlefolks than others—have you not?"

"Undoubtedly—nowhere more certainly," answered Paul—"though there would be different ground to be shown for the higher social standing, in each particular case. No one theory of aristocracy would account for the "first families" in any American city. And, as there are no definite or arbitrary crusts of gentility, above or below, the rise or fall of social consequence has a certain naturalness of play—a moral specific gravity, as it were—more just than in other countries."

"Wealth is an accessory, of course?" inquired the invalid.

"Yes, and so is good birth or descent from forefathers who have stood socially well rather than from those who have held popular office. But these are accessories only. Claims (over and above integrity and morals, that is to say), must be otherwise undeniable."

"Claims such as talents, you mean, or superior education?" said the Colonel.

"No," said Paul, hesitating and coloring slightly as he ventured upon a remark which only its entire truthfulness redeemed from being too directly complimentary, "there is nothing which gives such unquestioned social standing

in America as just what I have the happiness to see before me—Nature's mark and mould of superiority.

The father playfully smoothed off the golden-edged tress from the forehead of his child so superbly beautiful, and she, in turn, looked into his clear-cut and noble features—each finding in the other a confirmation of Paul's bold venture of appreciation.

"And it is a privileged country, in that respect," continued Paul, "for those who represent our first classes commonly have the look of it; and when the stranger is called upon to recognise the leaders of society, it may be tolerably certain that he finds them to be Nature's nobility also."

"Curiously different from Italy, in that respect," said Mrs. Paleford, "the peasantry having all the beauty in this least republican of countries."

"And the contrast must continue to strengthen," added the Colonel, "for, with the greater value of beauty and the higher position given by a natural air of superiority, the possessors of such gifts, in America, will make what are called 'the best matches,' and so the pick of Nature's outside chances and caprices will be constantly tributary to the stock of the upper classes. Here, it is very easy to see, the *physique* of the aristocracy is suffering pitifully from the opposite system—the nobility being very rigidly subject to intermarriage of old blood, and for reasons of

mere pride or interest. That fine races run out with this treatment, we see by the present dwarfed possessors of the great names of Spain and Portugal."

"Then you romantically marry for love, in America?" asked Mrs. Paleford.

"Oftenest," said Paul smiling, "though it is hardly looked upon as a sacrifice. It is taken for granted in our new country, that any young man worth having can at least support a wife; and, as married men are more trusted in business, from having more to be responsible for, a young bride is an improvement of her husband's credit, and therefore, in herself a dowry."

Miss Paleford lifted her head from her father's shoulder, and gave an attention to the conversation which Paul interpreted as only an amused interest in the novelty of the view.

"Oh," he continued, laughing, "you should go to America to see the difference that little trifle makes in the manners of the young ladies! Fancy a country where they *all* behave like heiresses!"

"Time to be thinking of the Duke's ball, my child," said Colonel Paleford. "There is not much complaint made," he continued, turning to Paul as the stately girl disappeared under the rough trellis-work which made the vestibule to their vineyard cottage—"not much that we hear of, at least, as to the subjection of the sex to this des-

tiny of 'bought-and-sold,' which, in our high European society, is scarce avoidable—but there is occasionally a proud spirit that makes bitter rebellion against it!"

Paul understood, from the degree more than usual of subdued distinctness with which the Colonel uttered this remark (at the same time so undertoning it as not to be overheard by his retiring daughter) that a point had been inadvertently approached where the pride of the queenly girl had made its resistance to what might be looked forward to as her lot, under the reduced circumstances of her family. Mrs. Paleford had, in the meantime, left them to assist at the *toilette* within; and, putting his arm through the Colonel's, Paul led off for a stroll through the vineyard, changing the subject as they turned away. We may leave the two gentlemen to their conversation, while we give the reader a hint or two, by which these—Paul's most intimate friends in Florence—will have a fairer introduction to our story.

Colonel Paleford was an English officer, who had retired from the service upon half pay, after losing an arm at Waterloo; and, with little beside that slender income for the support of his family, he had made Italy his permanent home. The extreme economy with which the mere necessities of life may be had in that country, by those who will consent to entirely forego show and luxury, had been thoroughly studied and unhesitatingly and openly adopted

by the independent and lofty-minded soldier, and he was thus enabled to live within his means and with little or no embarrassment or care. The cottage he rented, on one of the beautiful hillsides in the suburbs of Florence, was the rustic homestead of a vintager, whose simple Italian family were glad to bestow themselves in the out-buildings and serve as domestics ; and, with himself and his wife as the only instructors of his children, they had a little world of their own to which their natural nobility and refinement gave the atmosphere of a palace.

Paul had first met the Palefords at court, where they had a position quite peculiar to themselves. The English Ambassador was a man of strong good sense, and he had lost no opportunity of designating, by his own marked and constant attentions, the place which he wished his high-minded and soldierly countryman to take in the courtly estimation. But even this was not necessary. The sovereign of the Tuscan Court was a man to appreciate Colonel Paleford at a glance. Simple in his own manners, and a thorough man of the world, Leopold valued Nature's mark of superiority on those around him, and evidently felt his court to be peculiarly dignified and graced by the stately form with the empty sleeve pinned to its breast like a cross of honor, and the fine face distinguished above all the courtiers and men of rank for its intellectual nobility. Oftener seen in conversation with him than with any other

of his guests, he made his royal appreciation the universal one, of course.

But it was the daughter of the soldierly Englishman who was the mystery to the gay court of Tuscany. The father's constant presence at the various festivities had evidently no object but to bring her into society—her mother too much of an invalid to perform her duties as chaperon—yet she seemed to take little interest in the gayeties around her. Dressed always in white, and with the most studied simplicity and absence of ornament, she had his tall military figure for certainly a most becoming foil, and, as she was almost inseparable from his arm, they formed the one *tableau*, always seen, yet startlingly unique and beautiful. There were few whose eyes did not follow and dwell upon them as they were met promenading the long suites of rooms, or as they sat together with some distinguished group around them; and, among her own sex, there were few who did not envy Miss Paleford the constant procession of admiring “desirables” led up for presentation, while they could not but wonder at her quiet refusals to dance, and the calm dignity of coldness which was her only response to the attentions of lords and princes.

To Paul, when first presented to her by his friend the Chamberlain, the stately Sybil had seemed simply a bewildering marvel of beauty. The artist within him had received the entire impression; and, engrossed with the study of the

wonder, as of a chance-seen and rare picture, he had endeavored only to watch the play of her features as she conversed, and so to store up and bring away some line of which his pencil might try to copy the witchery on the morrow. As the different foreigners left them, however, and the conversation fell into English, their common language, the Colonel had taken sufficient interest in his new acquaintance to propose that they should find a corner for a chat at their ease; and so, with the inseparable father and daughter, Paul had commenced a "wall-flower" intercourse, which soon (between the gentlemen, at least) ripened into a friendship. In the quiet and deferential tone of the young stranger's mind, the Colonel found something for which he insensibly formed a liking, and it increased as they met and exchanged thoughts, night after night, in the luxurious halls of the Pitti; though upon Paul's silent and artistic but still very evident study and appreciation of the fair girl who was the listener as they talked, he put only the interpretation of an unconscious homage to purity and loveliness, such as might easily be the ground-work of a passion—though of another secret of Paul's manner toward them both, the deeply-buried curiosity in his heart which they had powerfully re-awakened, and which they, of all persons, seemed most likely to gratify, neither Colonel Paleford nor his daughter had the means to form even a conjecture.

And, of this latter moving-spring to the intercourse between our hero and his friends, the Palefords, we shall have more to say, farther on.



CHAPTER VIII.

OF Bosh's dinner at the Firkins's (for the biography of the two friends may as well keep pace while they are rooming together), we shall have time to give a general idea while the humble carryall of the Palefords is winding its slow way to the Pitti. The court ball was to be late; and it was a moon to loiter under; and the three friends, wise enough to realize that life for that hour was as enjoyably complete as human life could well be, were content to let Giacomo, the old vintager, who was their driver, take his time.

The "Palazzo Firkin," the splendid residence of the wealthy American family, had been the abode of an extravagant Russian nobleman, the unpronounceableness of whose name had facilitated the change to its present designation, and whose ruin and break-up had chanced to occur about the time of the arrival in Florence of Mr. Summutt Firkin, of the wealthy firm of Firkin, Splitfig &

Co., wholesale grocers of Cincinnati. Under the direction of his daughter (the family government being an oligarchy of one—'PHIA FIRKIN, as Miss Sophia, the heiress was commonly called), the Prince had been bought out, "concern and liabilities"—house, horses, furniture, French cooks, grooms and dressing-maids, all included—Russia walking out after breakfast, and America entering in time to dress for dinner. His ruined Excellency having brought his establishment to Italy by the way of England, the servants had picked up English enough in that country to be intelligible to their new household; and, as parents and children, were thereby enabled to speak their mother tongue, and awkwardness, if any there were, was shifted upon those, either guests or servants, to whom the Ohio was unhappily a foreign language, Mr. Firkin found himself, from the start, quite as much of a prince as he had any occasion to pay-the-bills-and-be; while Mrs. Firkin, after a few days of effort at "realizing," was entirely comfortable. The eldest boy, Master Rodolphus Firkin, found the stable, with stanhope and "tiger" exactly to his mind; and the "fast" young lady of eighteen, to whose wheels in deep water papa and mamma were but the necessary paddle-boxes, and to whose intended career, "abroad," all this was but the delightful machinery, "went ahead."

With the variety of governments in Italy, and the em-

barrassing difference in their coinage and values, the "letter of credit" is necessary to all travellers; but this does not result merely in drawing the amount on arrival. With the presentation of the letter, the stranger and his family are invited to the weekly *soiree* of the banker, which is a candidacy for the other more exclusive circles; but which is, more particularly, the "stalking-field" for the damaged reputations and doubtful titles and fortunes of which Italy is the "Alsatia." The banker's "letter of advice" from his London or New York correspondent (preceding the traveller), has usually given some idea of his financial consequence at home, and, this known, the family's remaining worth-while-ativeness, as acquaintances to cultivate, is come-at-able readily at a *soiree*. And it was by introduction under this knowledge and circumstances, that the Firkinsees enjoyed the distinction of their present titled acquaintances—the company who were to meet Mr. Blivins (Lady Highsnake, Baroness Kuhl, Sir Cummit Strong and Count Ebenhog) having called at the Palazzo Firkin after an introduction at the banker's, and being now almost the daily appreciators, both of the brilliant eccentricities of the marriageable daughter and of the dinners which the Russian had left in training.

To Bosh, himself, Mr. Firkin was a very old acquaintance. The "Blivins boat" had carried many a freight of butter to New Orleans for the house of Firkin & Splitfig,

and the very sight of the son of his old captain relieved something of the homesickness of the expatriated grocer. He had used a degree of positiveness not very common between him and 'Phia, in insisting that Mr. Blivins (who had not even an artistic repute at Florence), should be cordially welcomed, at first; though Bosh very soon established a footing for himself, in Miss Firkin's approbation, and by a little adventure, which should be given, in fact, as the introduction to their present friendly intimacy.

The stable of Count Kickubrichinoff had contained several very fine saddle-horses, of which Miss Firkin, with her backwoods education in the heart of Kentucky, was, of course, likely to try the metal. In fact, it was only by the addition of a horse that she felt entirely herself; and, with a groom behind her, and a gentleman companion, if she could get one, the "dashing American heiress" was soon a well known object of curiosity among the fashionable equipages on the Cascade.

But, the *companion* was the trouble! Willing as she was to furnish the steed for her two titled admirers, there was no getting them mounted, after the first essay in her rapid company. Sir Cummit was too carefully put together (reputation and ivory) to stand such risks of exposure, and Count Ebenhog, being unfortunately of the pitchfork model rather than of the tongs, had a top-heavy liability which was the drawback to his tall seat at table. They might

have had other reasons for not wishing to advertise themselves as the followers of the heiress, but these were given as explanatory enough, by the head groom, who, to his new young lady, had taken a prodigious fancy.

The proposal to ride the spare horse had been made to Blivins rather as a *bagatelle*, he having called at the moment of mounting, and it was somewhat to their surprise that the "tall and awkward hoosier" gravely accepted. They mounted him upon a powerful English hunter, which had been the favorite of the bankrupt Russian; and, with many a caution from Bill, the groom, particularly as to the use of the spurs, which Bosh requested might be added to his equipment, he followed his lady forth like a true knight.

But the hunter seemed very comfortable and content under his new rider, and, as Miss Firkin proceeded to try experiments with her familiar palfrey in the open ground of the Cascine, she discovered that her companion was as much at home as herself, and, in fact, was one of those men recognised as a class in the West, and defined as "born a-horseback." Bosh kept like a shadow at her side in all her vagaries, and was entirely at his ease, so that, on their return to the city gate, the belle had fallen into a very demure pace, and was riding like any other lady.

At the gate ahead appeared a difficulty, however. Across the way stood a mounted dragoon, and it was

at once understood that this less frequented gate was reserved for the day to the use of some of the Grand Duke's imperial relatives from Austria, the royal entertainment being a *fête champêtre* at the duke's farm. In honor of their Imperial transit, back and forward for the afternoon, that entrance to the city was under guard, and common horsemen and carriages were to go round by the next gate.

Now, to Miss Sophia, this was particularly inconvenient. Her time had been carefully calculated, and, with a dinner-party at home and a box at the opera in the evening—toilettes accordingly—the additional circuit of the three or four miles was unbearable.

"What shall I do?" she vexatiously inquired of her companion, after stating the case to him, and finding that he had not Italian enough even to request leave for a lady to pass.

"Why, there's but one man that I can see," said Bosh, buttoning up his coat, "and, if it's merely him you want out of the way"—

The Western girl looked at Blivins very inquiringly. Was he joking?—or crazy?—or was it possible that he would do so very hoosier a thing as encounter an armed dragoon for the whim of a lady?

"Do you mean to say that you could remove that mounted guard so that I can pass?" she asked, bending her bright black eyes very searchingly upon him.

"Not if he expected me," he answered, "and I with no tools—but as matters stand, we can manage to get *you* through, easy enough. We'll first get up a pretty fair pace, as if we saw no reason why he should stop us, and if he puts out to head us off, why, I'll clap spurs and ride into him. You are a lady, and it'll be natural to be frightened and go ahead. He'll go over—with all that trumpery, and this horse twice his weight—and you'll have time enough to be out of reach before he picks himself up, I'll warrant."

"And you!" asked the now excited girl, giving a thought to her companion while she felt her Western blood tingle with the prospect of adventure.

"Oh, I run the same gauntlet, said Blivins, and shall very likely, get through too. So, turn on the steam!"

With a touch of the spur, Bosh waked up his hunter very thoroughly and went prancing away, and, a little in the rear, capered the palfrey of Miss Sophia. With all the apparent simplicity of "*ignorant Inglesi*" they approached the gate; and, as expected, the dragoon put his charger forward a step and waved his forbidding arm. The audacious riders kept on. Out flew the sword for intimidation; and in the next moment, the powerful blood hunter took the spurs up to the rowels, and, dashing to the left with a tremendous leap, Bosh and his steed avalanched into the lap and holsters of the dragoon. Down they went,

pell mell, the charge having been wholly unexpected by the enemy; but the active hunter, recovering his legs while the astonished trooper was still thinking of picking himself out of the dirt, Bosh clapped spurs again and followed his lady—successfully reaching the Palazzo Firkin after something very like the tournament of a cavalier.

There was a police arrest, immediately, of course, and it took some intercession of Paul, through his friend the Chamberlain, and some considerable “damages” from Mr. Firkin, for the damaged dragoon, to get Bosh out of the scrape; but it established the tall hoosier in the favor of the Kentucky-bred girl—one man, at least, who would “go the whole” for her—and, at the Firkin dinners he became thereafter indispensable.

We should fail to give a just idea, however, of the American heiress’ campaign in Florence, without copying a letter of her own which is under our hand, and which reports authentically, of course, her mode of “carrying on the war.” She thus writes (with the exception of such corrections of spelling and punctuation as the printer is requested to make in a manuscript indicative of rather a careless education) to her friend and schoolfellow, Miss Catherine Kumletts, of Rumpusville, Alabama:—

FLORENCE, —, —.

DEAREST KITTY :

By looking at the bottom of the fourth page you will see that I still write to you "*au naturel*" as our French grammar used to say, and I beg to inform you, more particularly, that I am, as yet, neither Lady Cummit Strong, nor Countess Ebenhog, but simply your old friend 'Phia Firkin, not much aggravated nor diminished. The above titles, however, being my present imminent catastrophes, I name them at once, to ease your anxious mind.

La! they do things so differently here, Kitty! A girl's admirers have to keep such a distance! You'll scarce believe, now, that these two titled dangles are understood lovers of mine, and have got their percussion caps all ready to pop, and yet I have never been a minute alone with either of them! "It is because their intentions are honorable, my dear," as old lady Highsnake expressed herself, when I named the same phenomenon to her; though how it is any more honorable the less acquainted you are, when you marry, I could not push her stiff old Ladyship to explain.

There's some difference, my dear, between Willy Wonteye's making love, for himself, in Kentucky, and Count Ebenhog's having himself praised to me by his friend the Baroness! It's funny how two such wholly opposite experiments can go by the same name! Courting! And not only second-hand, but from a woman, and in bad English! Of all the cold victuals in the world, I think love makes the very worst!

They go at it, these two old women, as if the mere repetition of complimentary speeches by two gentlemen in the blue distance was going to enamor *me*, but pouring their principal artillery into mamma and papa, and so *very* accidentally happening to want to

know how much the governor intends giving his daughter! Such dear little sweet peas as we girls are—expected to stay podded in our innocent simplicity even till after eighteen, if we're not married—just as if I couldn't see out enough to understand that these venerable belles are trying each to help an old lover of her own to a rich young wife! (Though, to be honest about this last idea, it was my French maid that turned the gas on to *that*.)

But what do you think of me as a "tiger," Kitty?—claws and all, a veritable *he tiger*! Catch your breath while you realize—for *I was it*—just that varmint, yesterday afternoon—no more, no less! You shall hear about it—though it is putting awful trust in post-offices to write it to you, and the letters of the Editor of the "Alabama Eagle" (your last lover, I think you said he was?) delivered at the same window! Think of those breeches of mine in a paragraph! Bless us, Kitty! take care!

You must know, then, that Master Rodolphus Firkin, my adult brother of sixteen, was going to the races the other day. He has his own horse and stanhope, but he wanted my mare Fanny to drive tandem, and as he and I never stand in each other's way, I agreed—only it occurred to me that Bob, his tiger, was about my size, and that I should like to see the fun myself, out of a pair of white-top boots. 'Phus had no objection, if I would "go through the motions;" and, with a little bribing and palavering, I got the toggerly and arranged that Bob should be missing. (Money, in this part of the world, is a trifle more omnipotent than with us—a fact you can "pot and pickle," Kitty, against you travel this way and have a little odd want or two yourself! Few things you can't have, if you'll pay for them!)

But they are shaped a little differently from us, after all, these "same-sized" youths, and we were half the night, my maid Rosalie

and I, altering buttons and letting out and taking in—till, towards morning, I got waistcoat and corduroys all right; and, at the proper time, next day, I stepped out and opened the gate for brother 'Phus, and hopped in—"as like that boy Bob," the old head groom said, as he ran his audacious eyes all over me, "as there was any sort of necessity to be!"

Well—away we rattled. 'Phus's horse Pontiff is a thunderer, and Fanny was all right, and on those flat stone pavements it was beautiful wheeling! I felt a little funny, with my hair hid away in the top of a hat, and my knees playing about so, in separate parcels—(small-clothes show your garters and are so queer!)—but 'Phus drove splendidly, and along we went past the hotels and *cafés*, all crowded with staring loungers, and were soon out in the open country, two as handsome and manly fellows as you'd any day wish to see! Oh, it felt so pleasantly! I had a creeping sensation, the emotion of a silky young moustache, I'm very sure, just under my nose, and I have an instinct that those are little differences that grow by thinking of. You know that's what Miss Discipline Jones used to tell us, in her Lecture on "Volition:" "*Will*," she said, "*will*, young ladies! why it would make the hair come on a bald place!" And she had quite a moustache herself, the cross old thing!

The race-ground was five or six miles below the town, on the bank of the river—(trotting matches between gentlemen's horses)—and all the "fancy" were out, in all sorts of "drags," making it very likely that just what *did* happen *would* happen. We were "spilt," just as we got to the ground, and I went, easy enough, into the ditch, hat and boots—Major Phelim Blankartridge, the wild Irishman, whose phaeton had run into us, bowling away without once looking over his shoulder!

But now comes the trouble! A wheel gone, and how to get home! It's the worst of an all-sufficient gender that nobody rushes to your assistance, in such a case! Two such saucy-looking fellows (of course everybody thought) had nothing to do but hop on to their two animals and make for home. Well enough for 'Phus, perhaps—but with no saddle, and *me* to ride five miles like a groom, bareback! Oh Kitty!

'Phus got me on, however, from the top of a stone wall, and on we pottered. Ah me! Well, we reached Florence, through much tribulation, about sunset. You have no idea—but I'll not harrow your tender feelings with particulars. It does not seem to me, now, that I could ever have so much mortal uncomfortableness again! Those open streets of Florence, in broad daylight! And *me*, obliged to look perfectly natural! Oh! oh!

Not much else to write to you about, dear Kitty, though I thought I should have any quantity of flirtations to astonish you with when I got over here. But as girls are not allowed to choose for themselves, they don't want them tampered with, I suppose—so I don't get even a nibble. I hear of a Mr. Fane that I mean to set my cap for, but he's an *attaché*, and so finds enough to do at Court. Mr. Blivins, his room-mate, is a friend of ours, however, and that'll bring him, perhaps, in time. No more at present, dear Kitty, from

Your affectionate

'PHIA FIRKIN.

And, having thus introduced the reader to the company with whom prosperous Bosh was eating his distinguished dinner, while Paul was on his evening visit to the Pale-

fords, let us resume our friend's history by overtaking him, later that night, on his way to the court ball at the Pitti.



CHAPTER IX.

It was not a *bal paré*. Ladies were not needlessly "trained" and feathered—gentlemen not cumbrously gold-laced and sworded. Everything was royally sumptuous, but everybody (or at liberty to be) simply comfortable. It was the best that the wealthiest sovereign of Europe could do, in a capital that is another name for Art and Taste, to supply the maddening incompletenesses of a first night of June. The music, the perfume of the flowers, the skillful and marvellous illuminations, the surprises of architecture, and the effects upon statuary and pictures—these and the other luxuries of the palace were blended into an enchantment as tangible and satisfying as it was strange and wonderful; and it was felt to leave nothing unanswered in the dreamy moonlight out of doors, nothing unsupplied of which that atmosphere of Heaven awoke the spirit-hunger and thirst.

The Palefords had come late; and the father having transferred his daughter to Paul's arm, they loitered lei-

surely through the long galleries and ante-rooms, wondering over the profusion of rare flowers, and now and then listening in breathless silence to some more exquisite turn of the music in the distance ; but they reached the reception-room at last—unwillingly, on Paul's part—and at a critical moment, as it chanced. The Grand Duke, for the first time since the death of the duchess, had consented to lay aside his saddened reserve, and was about to mingle in the dance. As Miss Paleford appeared upon the threshold, it seemed to decide a question in his mind ; and, meeting the trio half-way as they advanced to be presented, he took the hand of the English girl—his royal invitation, of course overruling what, to one of any lesser rank, would have been a refusal—and led her out for the quadrille.

“Will you find a partner, and make us a *vis-à-vis* ?” she said to Paul, with a slight retention of his arm, and in a voice intended to express a wish for the duke's hearing.

But Paul followed rather an instinct of his own. He did not take advantage of the consent that was in the duke's momentary hesitation and look of inquiry ; and the quadrille, in the next instant, being made up without him, he found a stand where he could be alone and unobserved. To be a silent spectator of that dance was his need, scarce explainable.

His majesty's departure from a reserve which had been somewhat oppressive, was a novelty that went electrically

through the rooms; and, by the time that the other sets were formed with some attention to precedence and etiquette, the dancing-hall had become crowded with lookers-on. Upon the raised platforms at the sides, gathered the jewelled throng of dowagers and their attendant princes and ambassadors; and in the corners and recesses of the room clustered all that was in Florence, that night, of either honored or illustrious. The duchess-mother, pleased with her son's resumption of his royal place amid the gayeties of the court, looked down upon the dance with her sweet, effortless smile; and Colonel Paleford, who had continued to converse with Her Grace after the reception, stood now with his noble and erect figure distinguished above all the royal coterie, listening with quiet pride to the appreciative comments upon his daughter.

It was a chance *tableau*, upon which the whole court was now bending its eye; but Paul felt, the moment his gaze took in the lovely vision, that, in the artistic atmosphere of the Pitti Palace, the world's inner sanctuary of Genius's recognition of Beauty, it was impossible for any but one thought to be suggested by the figure of Sybil. *There stood one who, by Nature's unmistakable moulding, should have been a Queen!* By the efforts of the chamberlain, on seeing Leopold bring a partner to the dance, the quadrille had been completed from the rank that would best grace the movement with a welcome, and, with

the exception of Miss Paleford, it was a *carré* of only royal descent—princes and princesses completing the sett while she danced with the Sovereign.

Over the gentle and intellectual countenance of the Grand Duke there was the expression of admiring tenderness which was natural. He evidently forgot state and sceptre in watching his partner as she moved. The tall figure that would have been too majestic but for its cloud-like airiness of grace—the imprint just less than pride on those wonderfully clear-cut features, yet their indefinable loftiness and supremacy—the infantine abandonment of every nerve and muscle to instinct, yet the inevitable elegance which Art finds so difficult—the entire perfectness of that unconscious girl, in white, and without an ornament, as a creature of God indisputably queenlier, as well as simpler and fairer than all around—it was seen to be impossible that the owner and daily reader-aright of the world's best pictures and statuary was not reading aright, also, this warm and breathing masterpiece at his side. Was there likely to be a single heart, among all those eager watchers of this passing drama of a moment, through which there did not pass a sigh for the monarch—something like pity for even a throne, to which such beauty as that could not be lifted? Paul thought not.

But while Fane's earnest eyes were looking with their utmost intensity upon the picture that so occupied the

court, he became aware that he was closely observed by Colonel Paleford ; and it flashed across his mind (as he afterwards had occasion to remember) that, though his absorbed manner had told truly of the entireness of his admiring homage, the causes and character of that homage might still be misunderstood. Of the two interests which he felt in the scene, either of which might give to his gaze the apparent concentration of enamored worship, his friend had no means of forming even a single conjecture.

As an artist only, Paul would have been sufficiently engrossed. In the English girl, at that moment, there was a singularly rare model of beauty, seen with startling accessories of effect, and under the same roof and with the same atmosphere as the creations of Titian and Raphael—a lesson for the evasive appreciation and memory, such as the intensest study would but imperfectly bring away. How look enough into that large grey eye, while the flattery of a sovereign, the music of a palace, the utmost stimulants of pride and feeling, were calling every possible charm into its expression ? How watch closely enough the *pose* of the faultless neck, when there was more need than ever before that the superb head should be carried proudly ? How reluctantly would he lose any shade of play in those admirable features, when, to remember and paint her, as she

reigned in beauty at that moment, might be a whole drama for the genius of his pencil? All this, and a world more of stimulating thought was giving electric vitality to the gaze of the artist only.

But the curiosity which was his still more secret errand of travel—and to the thirsting want of which, that instance of peculiar beauty, with the accompaniments of the place and hour, chanced to be just the ministration most satisfying! It would have been an event to him to have seen Sybil Paleford—even if it had been only in retirement. There was upon her the undeniable mark of that amalgam of which he most wished to know the grain and lustre—Nature's finest and purest clay. She was the perfection of pride in mould and mien, as she was of tender expressiveness in beauty. Yet capable as he now felt of judging of this, there was, as it chanced, that night—in the unanimous homage paid to it also by a sovereign and his court—priceless corroboration! Around her stood the fairest flowers of the Tuscan nobility, several illustrious visitors from the other royal races of Europe, noble travellers from England, and the bright circle which the Pitti gathers in the families brought by the diplomacy of all courts within its walls. Never, probably, was there more of high-born beauty together, and never was dress or decoration more at liberty to be becomingly worn—yet this simple girl, in an unadorned dress of white, made

by her mother's needle, and with her golden-edged braids of brown hair laid to the mere shape of the head by her mother's fingers, queened it over all! Envy was silent. Jealousy was taken by surprise. She had come, that night, to be an unobserved wall-flower only at the ball. But, by the chance choice of the monarch, she had been throned for a passing moment where Nature would have given her the crown, and to that suddenly apparent sovereignty of beauty in its place, every courtly heart resistlessly dropped the knee!

That Paul was the artist to see, in this unpainted picture of real life, a more adorable masterpiece than ever stood upon an easel—that a morbid secret of his own heart gave him the key to read, in all its force and meaning, that poem of breathing beauty, so far deeper and more dazzlingly inspired than was ever moulded into verse—were two unseen fires burning under the glow of his gaze; and, that it looked, to the watchful-eyed father of that beautiful girl, like the unmistakable entrancement of a passion undeclared—one upon the strength of which, at least, the happiness of a beloved child might safely be staked—was in no way wonderful. As a parent keenly alive to the uncertain provision which his own pensioned life gave to his daughter, and anxious therefore that she should marry, but who, still, above all worldly requirements in a suitor, would demand the elevating romance

of a most genuine natural attachment, such appearances would, of course, be stored away. And, with the habitual alarm of the proud spirit of Sybil herself at the possibility of any mercenary disposal of her hand, it was the more important to watch well that such approaches as she did approve were, at least, what she thought them.

And here we must take the liberty to think better of the reader than most novelists think of theirs. Our story, as one of real life, must turn on very trifling circumstances—the popular novelist, now-a-days, seeming to suppose that the turning point of his narrative will not look probable or interesting unless hinged upon a startling event. We have not found that the destinies in which we were interested were wrought out by such invariably large machinery. Coincidences and catastrophes, surprises and crises—common enough in vulgar life, and doubtless necessary to a melo-drama—have been strangely wanting in the equally trying experiences of the gentlemen and ladies we have known. A moment, or a look, has decided very critical culminations of the destinies we have had the privilege of watching, and we shall therefore trust the reader to be willing, that of such moment or look we should give the unstilted history.

As the royal quadrille came to a close, a little drama of unconfessed embarrassment fell into action—three

minds becoming suddenly occupied with the decision that was to be made by a single glance, and upon a matter of apparently very little importance. Taken as Miss Paleford had been from the arm of Mr. Fane, to be led to the dance, he might, without any violation of propriety, receive her again, or she might, a little more etiquettically, perhaps, be handed to the charge of her father. To the duke, of course, the disposal of his partner would be in simple accordance with the hitherto movement of the hand he held; but the look which the stately Sybil should give, to summon to her side the one who was to receive her, was the subject of her own thoughts, as the moment approached, while, to both the gentlemen who stood awaiting the decision, it was for unconfessed reasons, a problem of rather lively anxiety.

With a woman's tact of perception, the beautiful girl felt that, as the transfer to the care of another, after the dance, was to be from the sovereign's hand, and with the attention of the whole court upon her, she could not return to the charge of her mere companion in a promenade without a conspicuousness the allowance of which, on her part, would be the admission of a complimentary preference. Such was the degree of possible confidingness between herself and Paul, however, that to prefer being consigned to her father's charge, was to avoid at least an opportunity to resume the conversation interrupted by the

dance, and this, again, might be construed as indifference. And while this dilemma was presenting itself to her mind, she was not unaware of the intense interest with which, it will be remembered, Paul was gazing on her beauty.

But, in Fane's part of this wordless drama, there were conflicting elements which the others did not quite understand. He had been made aware (as was mentioned), by a chance-seen expression in Colonel Paleford's face, that, whatever was thought to be the motive of his own absorbed gaze at Miss Sybil, there was no disapproval of it. On the contrary, there was something very like the tenderness of parental interest and encouragement in the gently forward posture and thoughtful smile with which he found himself regarded. This suggested a possibility of which Paul had not hitherto dreamed, that his own assiduous cultivation of the friendship of the high-bred Englishman—mainly the following out of an unavowed interest in him as the finest specimen he had yet seen of lofty courtliness of nature—might have been interpreted, by his inseparable daughter, as the betrayal of a passion for herself. In the lapse of but a cadence or two of the music of the band, his memory had made a retrospect with crowds of conflicting disprovals and confirmations (the strongest among the latter being her pointed request that he would dance opposite when she was to be partner to the duke), but he now stood waiting to know whether he was to be called to her side

again at the close of the dance—balancing, precisely as her own perception was doing, the evidence that optional summons would contain, as to her feeling towards him.

The quadrille was within an instant of breaking up, and Paul observed that Colonel Paleford had not left the side of the duchess-mother. His eyes were eagerly fixed on his daughter, however, and it was evidently his intention to leave it to her own look to decide whether he should step forward to receive her from her royal partner.

“Does Mr. Fane ever expect to get his eyes back from that charming vision?” at this moment said a low musical voice just behind him.

Paul turned to the Princess C——, whose slightly accented but pure and fluent English was familiar to him, and he was but half through the response which civility required, when the music stopped! A glance! He was but half too late! With a look that was unmistakably shaded with a reproach, Miss Paleford was turning to the side where stood her father, and he hurriedly reverted to make the best of the unforeseen interruption and follow—but the princess was alone.

“Shall I take your arm to the garden?” she said, taking it, at the same moment, with the quiet authority of one accustomed to have her way, and following the crowd, who were now scattering off, after the dance, to the lighted labyrinths of the Boboli.

And, with the first turn on the fragrant garden terrace, leading from the palace-porch—the colored lamps struggling with the moonlight, the music of the band softening out at the windows to the night-air, and everything apparently attuned with irresistible timeliness and sweetness to love and love only—he passed Miss Paleford, leaning on the arm of her father.

With the well-known character of his companion for willful lawlessness and fascination, Paul could not possibly have been in more unlucky company for the aggravation of his contrarieties of position. The look he exchanged with his friends in passing could explain nothing. He even felt, a moment after, that, with the apparent misunderstanding of his feelings toward themselves, it would be but an embarrassment to offer explanation, were he to be alone with them again. Better to have time, at least, for some clearer light upon it, he thought; and it was with this need for seeing no more of the Palefords, that night, that he accepted an invitation from the princess, of which our next chapter will say more.

CHAPTER X.

To wind up a ball with a breakfast-party was one of the *specialities* of the eccentric princess who had taken Paul's arm after the quadrille; and, while he was yet puzzling his brain over his dilemma with the Palefords, he was bespoken for a gathering of choice spirits to whose table the sunrise should be the lamp. The villa G——, amid whose witcheries of rural beauty and luxury these untimely gaieties were held, was on the slope of one of the eminences beyond *Fiesolé*, four or five miles from Florence; and, Paul having accepted the offered seat in her Highness's britzka, they whirled punctually away from the Palace gate as the morning star rose in the east—the carriages crowding to the door for the departing guests, but the music still measuring gay vigils for the dancers within.

As the only person of very high rank whom he had yet seen who differed from other people by acting out an every-day consciousness of birthright (eccentricity, it was called by her friends, and less amiably designated by common rumor), the Princess C—— had an additional inter-

est to Paul. By natural character, she seemed, to him, simply eagle-born among the sparrows of society. At the same time that she willingly offended no one, nor took the trouble to defy any prejudice or usage, she had no recognition of a restraint. Her habit of mind seemed a tranquillity of mood—or disregard of what would irritate other people—from a mere sense of superiority. And this superiority would have been thought to be seldom or never asserted, probably, but that her supreme indifference was unpardonably offensive—keeping her in a constant attitude of contempt for what, under the soft name of “appearances” constitutes the covert supremacy of the Many.

With better blood in her veins than could be found in a suitor for her hand, the Princess C—— had still made a match of family interest. She was married young to a man of rank and of great wealth, considerably older than herself; and as, after the first year or two of wedded life, they had seldom resided in the same city, it was presumable that their tempers were not very congenial—though, as the public were not admitted to their secrets, the separation was not recognisable by etiquette. With plenty of means, and a position at any court unexceptionable, she made a home in one city of Italy after another, returning oftenest to Florence, however, which she much preferred, and where the villa G——, in the suburbs, was kept in luxurious readiness for her use.

Quite idolized by the few with whom she chose to be intimate, and pleasing nobody else, the fascinating princess could hardly appear, to any court eyes, otherwise than dangerous to one of Fane's age and inexperience—the merely being seen in attendance upon her, when, by propriety, he should have remained (as he had intended to do) at the disposal of another, having the look of a neglect which was the result of a self-evident preference.

The endeavor to convince himself that the Palefords must have understood the awkwardness of his position, and, with this, a half-conscious comparison of the exquisite beauty of Sybil with the reclining form thrown back in the carriage, and just visible by the gray light of the dawn, as they whirled along, was the counter-current of thought, which, for the moment, somewhat hindered Paul's flow of conversation.

Though wholly of another mould than the English girl, there was beauty in what he looked upon, however. The princess was, at this time, about thirty—and of a most ethereal slightness of figure. It was her peculiarity of appearance that, with the airy and *spirituelle* proportions which usually accompany a nervous habit, she was of such wondrous indolence of movement. Paul thought this repose, at first, to be the language of a period of life—thinking there might be an emotional lull, for a woman of thirty, corresponding to the calm of mid-forenoon after the

breezes of a summer's morning. But however this might have confirmed it, the temperament itself, he soon found, was the tranquillity of a nature in which the nerves, as well as the coarser sensibilities, had felt the control of pride. Her natural instinct of superiority, though of birth and rank, was intellectual—and, at the same time that it constituted, for her, a presence which refused to be subjective to the presence of others, it insisted on supremacy over herself. Her limbs knew no motion that was not gracefully deliberate. Her unvarying paleness, and her exquisitely subdued modulations of voice, were parts of the same self-mastery. It was only in the covert fires of those black eyes, so almost unnaturally large and lustrous—partly softened as they were by the apparent languor of the drooping lids with their sweep of overhanging lashes—that the capabilities of her character were betrayed. While, to common observers, the delicate, pale face, with its carelessly idle lips and dreamy look, was expressive of mere indolence and indifference, it would be startlingly apparent, to a closer student of expression, that, under the soft moonlight of such repose lay asleep a volcano of character.

The Villa G—— was a small paradise of luxury, and each expected guest, on arriving from the gaieties of the city, was shown into an apartment that would content a Sybarite. With the few minutes of solitude thus gained, Paul's buoyant health rallied from fatigue and care, and, as

he stepped out upon the lawn, it was in spirits with which the just waked lark sung in tune. To the princess it was veritable morning; for her habitual day was from midnight to siesta, and she had risen from well-timed sleep to dress for the duke's ball. As she made her appearance presently, in her favorite costume of turban and *négligé*, her profusion of black locks over her shoulders, and her girdle of golden cord swinging from her waist—(the tassels kissing each arching instep as it appeared, as if to call attention to the exquisite beauty of those deliberate little feet)—Paul could not but give a sigh for his pencil. It was a picture of the inexplicably patrician air—beauty made unimportant by the elegance and *maintien* that outdid it—of which he would have well liked to use that morning light in making a study.

The sliding windows of the breakfast-room opened it entirely to the main *plateau* of the garden, and the close-shaven greensward of the lawn meeting the carpet, it was an apartment half sparkling with dew, in which the guests now assembled. Every object was glowing with the rosy light kindling in the east, and the fragrance of the moist earth and flowers filled the room. On a table covered with the most consummate temptations for the appetite, the rays of the rising sun began to slant; and, as coffee was served to them, lounging in their luxurious *fauteuils*, a wondrous morning of Italy seemed in attendance on their

pleasure—parading for them, while they feasted, its spells of splendor.

They were not long at table—restraint being the excluded spirit in the princess's ideal of her own rightful sphere—and (the company, of course, being such couples as could be pleased to prolong a night's gaieties by a *matinée*) the labyrinths of the grounds were more inviting. With the beauty and fragrance of sunrise, the terraces and groves, shaded alleys, grottoes and arbors of the Villa G—— formed a wilderness of enchantment. Paul, as a comparative stranger, was understood to be the object of interest for the moment to the hostess herself; and, after a turn or two in groups around the fountains and statuary in the centre, each couple took its separate path for a ramble.

"The sun is like other every-day visitors," said Paul, while the servant was bringing cushions for the stone seat at which the princess was halting for a lounge; "his coming and his going are more agreeable than his stay. What noon is equal to a dawn or a sunset?"

"Yes," she said, "and it is a pity we cannot sleep away the middle of a visit as we do the middle of a day. But, to think of society's wonderful slavery to habits, when, at this most luxuriously beautiful hour of the whole twenty-four, the classes who could best appreciate it are asleep in their beds."

"Few, except people of genius, see things *with first eyes*," he replied.

"But it should be clear enough, even to borrowed eyes," she continued, "for never is Nature half so beautiful—the dew giving a brighter color to the grass and foliage, and a fresher atmosphere over everything. And then the birds particularly musical and the flowers particularly fragrant—why, it seems marked, over and over again, by Nature, for an hour to be observed and enjoyed!"

"And yet indebted to your Highness, I presume," said Paul, "for its very first admission into polite society. I never before heard, at least, of a pleasure-party given to titled guests at sunrise, and what does the mention of 'dawn of day' suggest, but laborious poverty and the being unwillingly astir betimes?"

"My recognition of the day's best hour, then," recommenced the princess, after a reverie which Paul had respected, "is something like my preferences, in society. The men, particularly, that are least thought of, are, so very often, Nature's best!"

"You like us, I suppose," said Paul, "men or mornings, when we are not past blushing?"

"Yes—rosy morn or rosy men," laughed the Princess, "particularly if the men blush as you do now, with saying a good thing. But that does not explain my preference, quite."

"Nor will any one ideal, certainly," he suggested again.

"No, for I am speaking of men for a woman's set of friendships, not for her one passion," she replied; "and though there are fewer of the class I prefer, there may be, in an ordinary round of acquaintance, more than one of them—of men particularly gifted by Nature, I mean."

"But these are oftenest men of genius," objected her now earnest listener; "poets and artists, scholars and authors, who are poor and obscure."

"As society is constituted," she continued, "the *grands seigneurs*, even with birth and fortune only for recommendations, are undoubtedly the best to marry. So much for the pedestal and the rough-hewing, which are to mark the elevation and outline the purpose. But it is the expression that is to breathe through the statue which is to constitute its after-value and superiority to other blocks, and how is this to be given without something besides the shaping of mediocrity? That is what I wonder at women's not seeing, as you express it, with 'first eyes!' Intercourse with common minds so strangely contents them! How seldom does a woman of rank give herself a thought as to whether she is visited by the *intellectually* high-born or low-born! Content with her court acquaintances, she has, perhaps, not a man of genius on her list!"

"It is probably more because *he* is badly gloved, than because *she* is badly educated," said Paul.

"Ah! but wait till better gloves make her prefer a count's hand to a duke's," she once more insisted. "Women are quick-sighted in most things, and the wonder to me is, that the same pride which makes them ambitious as to title, house, equipage and dress, does not suggest also some corresponding aristocracy of conversation."

"Is it not vanity that makes the choice," asked Paul; "or, at least, an instinctive dread that intellectual conversation may demand too much, or otherwise have less flattery in it?"

"Why, there, I think," more eagerly argued the princess, "you touch upon the strangest mystery of all! What so delicious to a woman's vanity as the subtle appreciation which she can get from genius only! Common-place minds make very common-place compliments, it seems to me, and there is scarce a woman in the world who has not some beauty or grace likely to go unrecognized among dull people."

"It would delight an artist to listen to your highness," said Paul, almost afraid that his concealed allusion to his profession would betray itself in his smile.

"Some men who are neither artists nor poets," she replied, "have the perceptions of genius, and it is not her beauty only that a woman wants appreciated. A favorably true reading of her qualities of mind and character is exquisite pleasure to her"—

"Even though it be a surprise," interrupted Paul.

"Yes, for there is a secret consciousness at the bar of which all flattery is tried," thoughtfully added the princess. "It is the pleasure of the intercourse I speak of, with men of genius, that, though they compliment what may never have been complimented before, it is because it has been always overlooked. Yet we have at the same time been aware of its existence. Many a thing is true of us which we should ourselves lack the skill to define—is it not?"

"I am mentally reversing the picture," said Paul, with his eyes cast to the ground and his mind far away for the moment, "thinking how exquisite, in turn, to the man of genius, would be such appreciation of himself by the woman he admired—appreciation" (he continued, remembering to whom he was speaking, and meeting her dark eyes as he looked up) "such as could be given to a superior mind by perceptions and powers of analysis like your own."

"The which perceptions and powers," she said, with one of the most delicious of her indolent smiles, "I have been bestowing very industriously upon *you*, Mr. Fane! You may not take it as a compliment, but I assure you that your criticisms upon people and things, the first time I saw you at court, satisfied me that you were born for an artist."

"Happily not introduced to you as one, however," said

Paul, feeling the discovery thus far to be very agreeable, but still acting upon his habit of keeping his profession to himself.

“And why?” asked his friend with a more closely scrutinizing look.

“According to court usage,” he replied, (seeking the cover of ceremony from a discussion that might endanger his secret), “my position behind my diplomatic button is better than it might be behind an easel; and I could not presume to suppose that your highness would make an exception in my favor.”

“Very diplomatically stated!” said the princess, quietly, and I see that you were born also for a *portefeuille*; but your proposition is only partly true, notwithstanding. The formalities of my first acquaintance might be easier to the *attaché*—but all beyond that would be easier to the artist!”

Paul’s sensitiveness as to his secret began to grow nervous. He feared from the leaning of the last remark, that the princess knew more than she had admitted; but, thinking he would make one more effort to throw the artist into the background, he rushed into a digression that proved suggestive: “I should have supposed,” he said, “that your preference would have been quite the other way, and simply for a woman’s strongest of reasons—pride of monopoly. A diplomatist would give you all the powers of his mind—

or all you care for—those which he devotes to his profession being mere business faculties that have no sentiment in them; while the artist, of course, shares with you his ideal. The more genius he has to make you love him, the more imagination, dream-study, tenderness and even passionate longing, he will give to the Pysche of his Art."

"Better the half of a gold ring than the whole of a brass one," impatiently interrupted his listener, "even if your theory were altogether true. But, in the amount as well as the quality of the devotion, which is the richer, think you—a Laura in her Petrarch, or a countess in her Metternich? No, no, *mon ami!* The Pysche that you speak of is but the heightener of the capacity and desire—the rehearsal which gives perfection to the play! It seems to me that if there is any privilege worth being born to, it is to be better loved than others, and if there were but one genius-lover in the world, it should be a queen that should have him!"

"The 'Koh-i-noor diamond'—too precious for anything but the crown-jewel—found to be but a poor poet's love!" ejaculated Paul.

"Heavens!" continued the impassioned speaker (rising and pacing backward and forward, with her dark eyes glowing, and the usually tranquilly-lined arches of her lips curving with superb tensivity of expression), "the difference there is, between being even looked at by inspired or brute

eyes! The demand of the inmost soul that is answered by appreciation! There is something without language, Mr. Fane, which tells how we seem to others; and it degrades us to be admired by some minds—they so vulgarize and materialize all they look upon! Take the picture of a woman, if you could get it, out of the mind of a commonplace admirer—just as she seems to him when he is pouring his dull flattery upon her—and contrast it with the heroine of the novelist, or the ideal of the poet, or the Pysche of the sculptor! And to be thus inexpressibly more beautiful is the difference when genius is the lover!”

Paul, by this time, was studying with very genuine wonder and admiration the effect given to high-born grace and distinction by natural *abandon* and passionateness. She had stopped for a moment and stood, silently before him, lost in thought—the warmth of her tone and action betraying that the subject had turned a chance key to the chamber of her heart hidden from the world, and her flashing eyes and the expansion of her thin nostrils most forgetfully expressive and beautiful.

“Pardon me,” said Paul, with the enthusiasm of the most natural homage in his voice, “pardon me if, in turn, I recognize genius out of place—an *improvisatrice* who has been cradled for a princess!”

She offered him her hand with a sudden change to

gaiety of manner, and allowed him to raise it respectfully to his lips.

"We meet on new ground then, hereafter," she playfully said, "and, as an *improvisatrice*, of course, I may choose my character. You shall be what Petrarch would have been as an artist, and I will play Laura with such variations as I may choose to improvise."

"Madame," commenced Paul, with an embarrassed inclination of the head—but, at this moment, two of the other guests approached, returning from their ramble.

"Here come those," said the princess, "who are not to know us as 'artist' and '*improvisatrice*!' That is our own world, remember, my dear Fane!"

And preceding the other couple to the drawing-room—(Paul the sudden sharer in a confidence which he had not the time, even if he had had the skill to control or modify)—the curtains were dropped, and amid the in-door twilight now made more agreeable by the strengthening sun, the conversation became general between guests and hostess.

* * * * *

It was an hour or two after this that Paul was whirling back to Florence, alone in the princess's britzka, but with a brain very thickly peopled with contending thoughts. That he was under a spell of fascination, new and bewildering, he could not but confess to the two spirits that his consciousness compelled him to know were now looking

down upon him—his mother and Mary Evenden—but the chain that bound him was not thus altogether broken! The secret weakness of his ambition—the unconfessed and secondary, but still powerful, motive of his visit abroad, had been doubly touched and tempted, within the past night. How resist *some* trial, at least, of the intoxicating tests, now so apparently within reach—tests of what sympathy was possible between his own and the world's very finest and proudest clay? Sybil Paleford—should he risk the dangers of a friendship with such peerless beauty? The Princess C——, and her strange, bold defiance of the world—could he fly from her already bewildering spells to be alone with his home memories and his pencil?

The wheels rattled over the flag-stone pavements of the Piazza Trinita, while he turned over these busily conflicting thoughts, and, landed at the door of his lodgings by the liveried servants of the princess, he was glad to darken his room for early siesta, and seek the troubled mind's blessed refuge of sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

It was the middle of an Italian forenoon, with a light in the still air so broad, so generous and mellow, that the whole artist was content. Paul thanked God for June, as he stood before his easel. Not a pore in his frame that was reluctant to let his soul out upon his work—his eyes feeling largely willing, his hand breadthly and dexterous, his consciousness throughout proportionate and full—even Blivins, in the other corner of the vast room, conscious of the same delicious influence. “Paul!” said he, “my dear boy, did you ever feel such a unanimous morning?”

But Paul would have had too busy a heart, if his genius had not put it in harness. The subject on his easel gave it work. In a crayon sketch of three female heads grouped like the Graces, he was trying to bring in the light shadows that haunted him; for, in the dim background of his imagination, with changing prominence and brightness—fading into indistinctness at one hour, and all powerful the next—dwelt three visions of beauty. To each, in turn,

as its bewildering influence swept over his sleeping or waking dreams, he felt strangely and irresistibly subject. But so different looked they, near or distant, and, in the changing light of mere memory so impossible to bring into comparison, that he felt compelled to call his genius to his aid. If his pencil would but compel to the light those three viewless enchantresses, and so place them in contrast that one loveliness might be controlled and measured by the other—if he could sketch them, each at its best, as it appeared to him, and, in one unchanging picture, by which his outward eye could call to reason the capricious and evasive fancy, take refuge from the strangely alternating supremacy of one or another—he felt that he should be less hopelessly adrift.

As he elaborated more exquisitely an expressive line in the features of one of these beautiful heads, the intercourse that had passed between him and the Palefords, since the duke's ball, came freshly to his mind. We will leave him to re-touch, also, his crayon memories of Mary Evenden and the princess, while we outline for the reader one portion of the shadowy background to which his thoughts now wandered.

From his siesta, after the breakfast with the Princess C——, Paul had waked, with his English friends upper-

most in his mind. To his cooler eyes, his position, with reference to them, seemed more embarrassing. In their secret thoughts he was undoubtedly accused of an inattention that had the character of a slight; yet it was one that it would be extremely difficult either to explain or apologize for. From a merely indifferent acquaintance, it would scarce have amounted to an inattention, indeed; and, to mention it at all was to assume that Miss Paleford not only had an interest in his most trifling movements, but could find time, to be sensitive about them even when dancing with the sovereign.

Yet, his friendship with Colonel Paleford! Could he suffer any shadow to rest on that? By nothing that had happened to Paul, since his residence abroad, had his pride been so substantially gratified as by this courteous and lofty-minded soldier's preference for his society. It had given him an invaluable self-confidence as to his own quality of nature. If only from grateful attachment to the father, should he not run every risk to show that any conscious inattention to the daughter was impossible?

And another thought came up with this—a question that had occurred to his own mind more than once—was there not *a degree* of acquaintance, at which the maintenance of his own false position, as an apparent diplomatist, became an unfairness? Was it not quite time that he threw aside his borrowed consequence as an *attaché*

(the mere title, by foreign usage, implying just what he had no claim to, fortune, high connections and certainty of preferment); and would not the two explanations seem natural together? He seized his pen, at this thought, and, instead of his usual sunset stroll toward the Boboli gardens, indited the following letter:—

MY DEAR COLONEL,

Not quite sure that I have anything to write to you about—or rather, seeing very distinctly that what may seem important for *me* to write may not be important enough for *you* to take the trouble to read—I still venture to intrude upon you, as you see. It will not be the first time that your good nature has been called upon in my behalf, and, trusting to your having acquired the habit, I must pray you to pardon me once more!

An honor was done me by Miss Paleford, last night, to which I have properly no claim; and though the same flattering chance might never again occur, and the explanation, therefore, may be needless, I still feel uneasy without offering it to you. On the Grand Duke's taking your daughter from my arm, for the quadrille, she kindly proposed to me to find a partner and dance opposite. This, with a diplomatic rank, it would have been very proper for me to do; and, of course, the happiness would have very far exceeded the honor—but, by the distinction as to personages, with which the set was immediately made up, it was evident that an obscure civilian would have been out of place in the royal quadrille, and that in not availing myself of the opportunity, I was but acting rightly upon what I wish to explain to you—viz. that

my title as *attaché* is *nominal only*. Miss Paleford, of course, gives me the full benefit of the word in its common acceptation ; but, instead of being the young man of fortune and family for whom this door to a courtly career is usually thrown open, I am simply Paul Fane, an obscure youth, with no diplomatic or other promotion in prospect, and dependent wholly on my own efforts for future support—the American minister at Paris having done me the kindness to put this title on my passport merely as a facility of form, by which I might better see society. While I am at liberty, therefore, to be presented at courts, and, in my uniform of mere ceremony, play the looker-on, you will readily understand how the acceptance of any real diplomatic privilege would scarcely be honest.

Of course I had no time to explain to Miss Paleford why I did not avail myself of her generous permission ; but another question presented itself while I was looking on (at what you will allow me to say, as did all who had the happiness to see it, was a spectacle of unprecedented interest)—whether I could presume so far as to offer to receive again, from the hand of the sovereign, one who was being crowned, at the instant, with the glowing homage of his court. I was balancing the proprieties of my position as to this latter point, when the dance came to a close ; and, at the same instant, my attention was called off by the Princess C——, and the opportunity, even if I could properly have availed myself of it, was lost. And that lady being alone at the moment and claiming my attendance, I was prevented from joining you before you left, and thus putting myself in the way of even a subsequent explanation.

It is very possible, as I said before, that we may be looking at these matters from wholly different stand-points of view. Your daughter may think it strange that I could suppose her to have

any memory for such a trifle as I have explained, and you may feel that our acquaintance scarce warrants the obtrusion of my private history upon your confidence. But even this is not all! I must be still one degree more venturesome. You would scarce be prepared to comprehend my illusion, indeed—if such it be—unless I confess to you the *interest in yourselves* that forms its groundwork. I shall but clumsily explain it, I fear, but I will try.

There is a kind of knowledge the study of which forms an errand for me abroad, and to which you could scarce be aware of your exceeding value. While another traveller makes it his specialty to be curious in pictures or statuary, rare gems, mosaics, or other wonders of human Art, I make mine of the masterpieces of the Great Artist above all. To find the rarest workmanship of God in human beings, is my enthusiasm of search. With any degree of self-appreciation, and love for what is around you, your mind, my dear colonel, jumps at once to my conclusion. The supremacy of beauty awarded to your daughter, last night (in the Palace which is the inner sanctuary of Taste and Art), expresses but the rank which I had found her to occupy as a type of God's perfecting.

In yourself, and in the family around you, I must be excused for saying I have found what takes precedence of all I have yet seen abroad, of superiority by nature and culture. Even as a study, only, I might naturally desire to see the most of a gentleman and his household such as I had not before found; but the possibility of a *friendship with such as these*—a memory to store away and cherish in the far off country that is my home!—there was a charm in that hope, my dear friend, for the irresistibility of which from any impartial mind, I could safely lay claim to indulgence.

I must beg that you will not feel compelled to answer this letter. If you laugh at it when you next give me a shake of the hand, and

so forget it, I shall be abundantly content—its object being quite served if I may have relieved my own mind of its uneasiness without troubling yours.

With thanks (thanks of which you will now better understand the full meaning) for your kind hospitalities and friendly attentions, and, with my most respectful and grateful compliments to Mrs. Palesford and your daughter, I remain, my dear colonel,

Yours faithfully, P A U L F A N E .

Chancing to know that Colonel Paleford was to be at the English embassy that evening, Paul sent round his letter, with the ink scarce dry; but was a little mystified by the answer, brought him by his own messenger. It was simply a card on which was scratched with a pencil: “Drive out to-morrow evening, to tea.”

In the friendly informality of this there was, at least, negative evidence that his letter had given no offence to his friend; but Miss Paleford was still to see it, and whether it was to improve or damage his position in that delightful family circle, was the main question in his thoughts for the following day. One point he felt secretly more easy upon—the liberty he should now feel to address conversation to the daughter, and otherwise pay her such attentions as were natural. It was always at least possible, before, that he might be numbered among the *attachés*, who are proverbially eligible as suitors; and this, even as

a possibility being set aside by his avowal of poverty and obscurity, he could be freer to exchange thoughts with her, or even to express his admiration. Whatever the footing upon which he should find himself, after this trying visit, the field to cultivate would be one of friendship only, and free of all chance of misunderstanding.

Paul crossed the Arno as the afternoon light grew more golden, and took the southerly road winding into the hills—the difficulty of getting any conversation out of the thoughtful signore, who was usually so frank and courteous, acting very depressingly on the spirits of the favorite *vetturino*. But the passenger's perplexity of mind would have been vainly confided even to so affectionate a driver as Giuseppe. It was on what artists call "a vanishing line"—so imperceptible its change from light to shade—that Paul balanced the crisis of the coming hour. Invited familiarly as a friend, and undoubtedly to be treated as a friend, his reception by the Palefords was, still, to test most critically, he thought, the question on which he was sensitive. Would there be the faintest shade of difference in the manner, towards him, of these, the most refined and lofty-natured people he had ever known, now that he came to them stripped of every worldly advantage, and with no claim beyond his mere stamp by nature and education?

The sun dipped at the horizon as Paul walked up the trellised lane to the old stone *casa*, and, as the sound of his approaching footsteps was heard, he was called to, from around the angle of the house. In the shade of the eastern front stood the tea-table as usual; and here, in their easy-chairs, with books and papers, work and play-things, lounged the family, expecting him—the general acclamation with which he was received, strange to say, suddenly putting to flight all remembrance of what he meant particularly to observe! With the “How are you, my dear Fane?” of the colonel, the cordial pressure of the hand by Mrs. Paleford, and the joyous welcome by the children, he was so suddenly and completely made at home as to lose sight of his embarrassments altogether!

But Miss Paleford was not present. She had returned from the ball, not feeling very well, and “had been playing the invalid,” said the mother, “though it was the first time she had ever known Sybil to need so powerful a sedative—two whole days of solitude to recover from an evening’s surfeit of society!”

With the rattle of the tea-tray, however, the invalid made her appearance at the little vine-covered door-window of the balcony above, and gave an unceremonious “good evening” to the visitor, as she descended the open stairway to the terrace.

It is not too much to say that it almost took away Paul’s

breath to look upon that approaching vision. He had never seen Sybil Paleford before, except with the severest simplicity of dress—her hair made the least of, and her pride of coldness and unostentatiousness having guarded so closely against ornament or effect, in her exterior, as to give it the air of a rebuke to admiration. Nothing but the unconcealable proportion of her commanding stature, and the artistic fitness with which it was draped, prevented that plainness from being more than negatively simple—indeed, positively unbecoming.

Now, however, the fair invalid was in that most fascinating of all possible drapery for woman, the *demi-toilette* that, however carefully arranged, is to express her careless hour. From under a most exquisitely becoming cap broke loose a wealth of the golden edged locks usually so closely put away ; and, with this additional shade heaped so massively over temples and cheek, the eyes, to Paul's artistic perception, were made unfathomably deeper. The *négligé* robe, confined only at the waist, seemed almost profance in its disclosure of the white underdress from the waist downwards, and the pliant folds of a light blue semi-transparent material followed the movements of her beauty with a grace, which, to the artist, seemed like a sentiment—a caressingness, half timid, half venturesome, such as, if it could not be copied in a picture, might, at least, be told in a poem.

With the absolutely new disclosure made by this costume of intimacy, Paul was completely bewildered! Hers was beauty which embellishment first made to seem mortal—never before appearing within reach but to be revered and worshipped. The expression of that careless drapery was an admission, now first made, that hers was loveliness to be approached—the loosened tresses a first betrayal that they belonged to what mortal might yet caress. In the retreating swell of the faultless lines above the wrist, half hidden by the sleeve, there was more that was human, than in the arm bared to the shoulder with the full dress of evening. Even the slipper, though it disclosed less of the arching instep, was an encouragement to the admiring eye which the shoe of the ball-room never gave.

But the surprise of the evening was not all in this first impression. With Miss Paleford, heretofore, Paul had always felt that he conversed, through the mind and mood of the father, on whose arm she so habitually leaned. Not only was there no direct communication of thought, but her very recognition of others seemed to have a reserve of intermediation—as if it were only through the protecting third person's presence that her guarded consciousness could be addressed. There was a difference, now, however, which he could scarce explain. As she took her place between Paul and her mother, giving him her hand with the usual first commonplaces of greeting, there was a slight

heightening of color—but, this over, her features and manner gave an impression like the light in a just unshuttered room. Never before to him had that smile shone clear through, with no barrier between heart and lips. The look out of her largely open eye, was, for the first time trustingly complete. She was as childlike and playful as she was largely and nobly beautiful; and while, in the pride-forgetting joyousness of her every accent, Paul felt an electric exhilaration, he still struggled in strange bewilderment at the change!

With the mother's prudent dismissal of the invalid to her room, as the evening deepened, the visitor took an early departure—Colonel Paleford accompanying him to the gateway, and by a single allusion to his letter confirming what the manners and conversation of the family circle had already expressed. It was evident, that, while its points were not to be answered or discussed seriously, the spirit in which the letter was written had brought him nearer to them. They liked him better than before. And thus was settled, to his boundless increase of contentment, the foreshadowed problem of the evening.

But completely as this had engrossed his mind, to the exclusion of the beauty of the setting sun, on his way out, it was not the subject of thought, which, on his way home, made him equally unmindful of the gloriously risen moon. The wondrous loveliness of Sybil Paleford! The incredible

novelty of her impression upon him, with the removal of her proud reserve! And, how strangely had his anticipations been exceeded, as to the freedom of intercourse between him and her, which he had ventured to anticipate would spring naturally from his completeness of explanation! It could only be a friendship, of course—but what a new, bright poem of real life, would be a friendship with such a father and daughter! How *better than a love* it might be! How stranger, and yet more rational, than a romance! Ah, the new door opened into to-morrow and to-morrow! The intoxicating promise of intercourse henceforth daily and unreserved between himself and two such sovereignties in one—the finest workmanship of God he had yet seen in man, and the court-acknowledged supremacy of beauty in woman! Might not this be, to him, life's chapter of gold, sometime unrecognized when written, but wonderingly turned back to, from pages never again so bright!

It was a rapid review of these circumstances and thoughts which coursed through the mind of Paul, as he followed with his pencil a gleam of deeper insight into the features of Sybil Paleford. As his study of that face, and the other two, in the sketch upon his easel, had much to do with the moulding of his destiny, we shall bring the reader to find him again at work upon them, farther on.

CHAPTER XII.

It was an interesting day at the Blivins' studio—(some two weeks after the date of the preceding chapter)—Miss Firkin being expected at twelve to give Mr. Blivins her first sitting for a portrait, and Paul having yielded a point to his friend in consenting to be present.

This latter circumstance had been the subject of some argument, Paul having begun to attach a certain poetical charm to the secrecy of his artistic life, and finding, besides, that the possession of an unproclaimed accomplishment, such as the discipline of taste and eye which belongs to an artist, gave him a magnetism, like a sympathy of freemasonry, over the superior minds met with in society. Bosh's interest in the matter, however, even as a business consideration, abundantly outweighed all this. With Miss Firkin, who had attached great interest to the making of Paul's acquaintance, it would be a vast accession to Mr. Blivins's character as an artist, if Mr. Fane were known to be his daily visitor—showing either a sympathy of taste,

or still better, an amateur desire to take advantage of the facilities of his friend's studio to pursue a study of drawing. The commissions for portraits which might grow out of this—Miss Firkin being, as it were, the controlling axle to a large circle of titled subjects for his pencil—Blivins declared to be a prospect equal to the "good will" of a freighting-line on the Mississippi.

Business first with Bosh, of course; but there was another argument which he did not openly press, though it followed very close on the heels of the other in his secret thoughts, and, with a friend's tender interest in matters of feeling, Paul would have felt even more bound to make the sacrifice. Wabash was in love! It was the arbitress of his fate who was to sit for her portrait to him; and, with the light and shade of hope and trepidation was that picture—the picture of the possibly future Mrs. Blivins—to be drawn and colored! And this would have been betrayed, if by nothing else, by the restlessness of anticipation with which the enamored artist made his arrangements. Long before the appointed hour, the palette was set with its colors; the canvas stood ready upon the easel; and Paul's still assiduous pencil was left at work alone upon the beauty of the patient Giulietta.

"Close upon twelve, my dear boy!" said Bosh, coming behind Paul's easel with amiably concealed impatience, and looking upon his sketch as if to see what it was that

so unaccountably engrossed him; "don't you think you could leave off, now? The Firkins' coming—I expect them every moment—and Giulietta here, so very 'æsthetic,' as you call it, in her costume! Imagine what a dreadful surprise it would be for excellent Mrs. Firkins to see her!"

Paul pulled out his watch. "Half-past eleven only, and grand people are never punctual. They'll not come before half-past twelve, my dear Bosh, and we're at least safe in letting Giulietta stay out her time. Suppose, just to keep yourself from fretting, you give me a *pose*, that I very much want, just now—you and Giulietta!"

"But, Paul! my dear friend!" remonstrated the anxious Bosh.

"Here!—it will take but a moment!—Look at my sketch. You see these two figures—the younger Rimini, just stabbed by his jealous brother, is soaring away into ghost-land, with the spirit of the dead Francesca striving to cling to him. It has been a sinful love, you understand, for which he has lost his life, and the attempted caress, therefore, is received in the other world with reluctance. Now, I can't catch the expression of that—a woman's arms around an unwilling neck. Try to outline it for me—you and she!"

"What—stand like a figure afloat in the air, my dear friend!—how is it possible?"

"Oh, I'll arrange that," said Paul, proceeding to get Blivins's tall figure into *pose*—"something must be imagined, in every picture. Stand as near as you can, in the posture of the figure I have drawn—arms over your head—one leg out behind—so!"

By showing his sketch to Giulietta, Paul had easily explained, to her accustomed eye, what was to be the combination of attitude between her and Bosh. With a skillful twist of her petticoat, she imitated the winding-sheet falling from Francesca's hips, and then, with her long hair streaming down over her naked back, she mechanically took her position.

"Excellent!" said Paul, "excellent!"—proceeding to study the *pose* with all the ardor of artistic perception—"don't move an inch, my dear friend!"

And steadfast stood Bosh, accordingly—his arms over his head, the weight of his body balanced on one leg, and the other, as far as was possible, thrust out behind, while Giulietta stood, half tip-toe, straining her spread arms toward his neck—(the *tableau*, however, such as would seem to a common eye rather like a respectable gentleman trying to escape from a very slenderly dressed young woman)—when, suddenly, there was a scream!

"La'-d'-a-mercy!" cried Mrs. Firkin, snatching at her daughter's dress to prevent her entering the door of the room that the officious footman had thrown open without

knocking; "'Phia! 'Phia!—The horrid wretches!—what a place to come to! Why, I never!—'Phia, I say!"

And the horror-stricken mother had half succeeded in dragging her daughter back to the landing-place of the stairs, before the petrified Blivins (for Paul did not feel sufficiently acquainted to interfere) could utter a syllable of remonstrance. By the simple accident of coming a little before their time, they had stumbled upon the very scene about which Bosh was so prophetically apprehensive.

"But, Ma!" expostulated Miss Firkin (who was herself a little staggered at the spectacle of her friend Blivins apparently hard run by a doubtfully apparelled person), "Ma! he's going to explain!"

"I don't want any explanation of it, 'Phia! I saw it with my own eyes! Come right away, I say!"

The words "model" and "artists' rooms" had began, by this time, however, to convey a glimmer of the state of the case, and Giulietta's very proper and civil look as she hastily drew her dress around her, and passed out with her mother, contributed to quiet the alarm of Mrs. Firkin. Paul came forward also, and paid his respects with a formal deference, in which there was no consciousness of anything wrong or unusual; and so, at last, the unexpected commotion was allayed.

"My friend, Mr. Fane," said Blivins, as the ladies took seats and looked around, "is an amateur of the Arts, in

addition to his other distinguished accomplishments, and—(you see by his easel in the corner, ladies!)—makes use of my studio like a brother artist.”

“Particularly a privilege to-day,” said Paul, with a complimentary inclination of his head, “as I am to have the honor, I believe, of giving an opinion upon the costume and attitude in which my friend is to paint Miss Firkin! What is your own choice in the matter, if I may ask?” he continued, addressing the young lady with the tone of the most simple desire for knowledge on the important point.

“Well, I don’t know, I declare!” she replied, evidently laying herself out for a discussion that was going to be very delightful. “What do you think is my style, Mr. Fane? I will be painted as anything you and Mr. Blivins think of most when you see me!”

“I hope,” said Mrs. Firkin, with a decision that was intended to express her horror of the fancy-pictures which stared down upon her from every wall, “I hope, Mr. Blivins, that you will paint her as her father’s daughter, and sufficiently dressed for Cincinnati!”

“La! Ma! you’re always looking through your Ohio spectacles at everything!” pouted Miss ’Phia, half turning her back upon her; “I shan’t always be Miss Firkin, I hope, and I’m sure I don’t want to be stuck up for ever in one dress! Can’t you paint me in some character Mr. Blivins?”

"Miss Firkins is right," said Paul, putting in a timely word. "Fashions change hundreds of times while a portrait hangs on the wall, and the drapery should be something which fashion does not affect. Suppose you answer the lady's first question, my dear Blivins:—Of what character in history or allegory, does her personal appearance most remind you?"

Bosh was entirely reinstated in his dignity by the respectful solemnity of his friend's deferential appeal. He drew himself up, and gave a wide sweep with the pencil he held in his hand. The artistic inspiration was upon him.

"When I see Miss Sophia Firkin," he proudly announced, looking at her with the raised eyebrows of the loftiest admiration, "I see the Goddess of American Liberty!"

"A female figure in a helmet and tunic," said Paul. "It would certainly look well in Cincinnati."

But Miss Firkin's idea of the matter was not quite reached. "You have not favored us with your own opinion, yet, Mr. Fane!" she remarked, with a slight heightening of color. "Is there nothing you know of, that I could be painted *as* and not be covered up, somehow, as this American Goddess always is?"

With a glance at Miss Firkin's slight change of attitude—her chest a little thrown forward, and the left cheek

turned off so as to give plenty of room to the shoulder below—Paul saw at once that there were natural advantages of figure to which that picture was, in some way, to be made to do justice. The Ohio belle had been abroad long enough to see what was most dwelt upon by the Fine Arts; and a little vanity as to a needlessly concealed perfection or two of her own—(compared, that is to say, with what the artists expended so much study upon)—was not to be avoided. Still, with Mrs. Firkin's present alarm on the subject, it would evidently be impossible to decide at once upon such *pose* and drapery as would be acceptable to both her and her daughter.

“As to faces, Miss Firkin,” said Paul, in reply to her question, “I have found that they change in their impression upon us, almost invariably with closer study—particularly with study under the pencil. My friend Blivins, I have no doubt, in very little time, would find something better suited to your expression than the helmet of his goddess. Even with my own few minutes' study of your features (if you will pardon the artistic freedom of the remark) I have noticed another expression—something, for instance, that would work finely into a picture of Cleopatra applying the asp”—

“Oh, delightful, delightful!” suddenly interrupted Miss Firkin. Exactly my idea, Mr. Fane!—thank you!—Cleopa-

tra in a reclining position, holding the serpent to—to—just below her heart, isn't it?"—

"But this is only a suggestion," continued Paul, "and it would be better, at least, to give Mr. Blivins' own higher order of imagination its natural precedence. Genius requires time, Miss Firkin!"

Blivins bowed affectionately to Paul.

"Shall we defer the decision of what the character is to be, then, till we have first had a sitting or two, and made studies of the features merely? I have the consent of my friend," Paul added with grave humility, "to occupy my usual place at the other easel, and share his subject with him—Miss Firkin consenting"—

"Certainly! Certainly!" exclaimed the fair subject.

"And as I stand at a different point of view," he continued, "it will not be surprising if I see the expression differently. Perhaps, of the same subject, we may make two wholly different pictures."

This last proposition was altogether too delightful to be objected to—Miss Firkin enchanted, Blivins relieved of "immediate first pressure," and Mrs. Firkin considerably flattered with the interest taken in the matter by "that very polite Mr. Fane." With a request for the removal of the un-goddesque bonnet, and a timid hint or two as to attitude, etc., the happy lover made a beginning of his

Goddess of Liberty—(evidently persisting in his preference of that sacred Fourth-of-July-approved costume for the intended Mrs. Blivins)—and the united happinesses and anxieties went into paint and progress.

[It has long been a cherished opinion of our own, dear reader, that (as journeys are better achieved by a change of horses) stories are better told by an occasional change of narrators; and we shall take the liberty to hand over the remaining history of the painting of Miss Firkin's portrait to her own fresher powers of description—one of her private letters giving the particulars which will substantially complete it, besides the other lights and shadows which could only be furnished from her own different point of vision. She thus writes to the faithful school-fellow and ally, with whom she exchanged eternal vows of friendship and reciprocity of secrets, Miss Kumletts, of Rumpusville, Alabama:—]

FLORENCE, — — —.

DEAR KITTY:

I dare say you feel quite like a widow, not to have heard from your faithful 'Phia for so long (now three weeks since I wrote to you, I believe), but the neglect is not because I forget you. I think of you, on the contrary, oftener than ever, and because I have more to tell—which, you know, makes it so much harder to begin. Why, I live so much more than I used to, Kitty, that I feel like half a dozen of what I used to be! In fact, multiplied as my existence is, at present, I should not feel justified in marrying

any *one* man. Don't you think there is danger of outgrowing the "allowance for one"—becoming, in one's own self, a sort of seraglio, as it were? At any rate, my mind must be more clear as to what constitutes a "single woman," before I give the whole of myself to a single husband!

But, to drop this discussion of principle (for fear you will think it is one of my old compositions, dear!) and begin with the news. Politics first, of course. What do you think is offered to papa, by secret embassy from one of the courts of Europe? At least, the Baroness Kuhl declares, that, in consequence of the proper representations to her government, by Count Ebenhog and herself, she is authorized to propose to the distinguished Mr. Firkin to become a count—(a real live German count and no mistake!)—for just money enough to pay the expenses! The twenty thousand dollars (about the sum it would cost, she thinks!) would be paid in advance to herself, as it is what she calls a dormant title in her own family which is to be bought out—but Count Ebenhog would also require a "consideration," viz. :—(wait till Miss Namely catches her breath, if you please!)—my own trifling little heart and hand, "be the same more or less."

Now, what do you think of being courted in that sort of way?—for that is simply a diplomatic proposal of marriage! These sly Germans thought I should be willing enough to be made a countess, but they wanted first to get what business folks call a "*bonus*" out of papa. And in a country where all the love is thus made through one's anxious parent, of course you suppose a young lady's feelings are all of a size. But I have my little preferences, notwithstanding; and of these I now proceed to give you the confidential particulars.



[We will omit this portion of Miss Firkin's letter, as not having any special bearing on our story, and come at once to the last page, and of its mention of her portrait by Mr. Blivins.]

* * * * *

But it is curious how the kind of love that one means to settle down upon, after all (when our little innocent flirtations are over, you know, Kitty!), just spoils a man for painting one's portrait! I went to sit to my devoted Blivins, expecting that he would, at least, make me as good-looking as I am—(especially as, by the way, he talked to me, I was sure he thought me very beautiful), and what does he do but begin his *husbanding* of me at once—painting me in a helmet and tunic as a Goddess of Liberty, that is to say—and a more boxed up woman you never saw, out of a coffin. There was nothing to be seen of me but the face! Now *you* know, Kitty (for we have compared notes on the subject), that what little beauty I have is not exactly *there*. It has been my greatest comfort, in visiting these foreign galleries and studios, to see that the painters of all ages (ugly “*old masters*” as well as handsome *young masters*) dwell particularly on just where I am perfect. There is not a Virgin Mary, nor a Saint Cecilia, nor even a Lucretia (and this last is a pattern of modesty, you know), that is not painted, as you may say, with a *figure*. And mamma says it is only because there are so many exposed bosoms (fifty, at least, in every gallery) that people walk round and look at them so unconcernedly. So, don't you see, that if it were only *the fashion* for us *all* to show our figures, it would be proper enough! In the East, it is improper for a woman to show her mouth; and I dare say that, if

there were only one woman in the world that showed her elbow, it would be considered very immoral.

But my portrait—(for I have not yet told you quite all)—came very near being painted the right way, notwithstanding. Mr. Fane, Blivins's friend, is studying drawing, in the same room; and he offered to "make a study," as they call it, by painting me, at the same time, as Cleopatra poisoning herself. And he made a beginning. But you know, to find her heart (where the poisonous serpent is to be applied), Cleopatra is obliged to get below her figure, a little—(rather more, at any rate, than I could sit for)—and, though Mr. Fane offered very politely to paint as much of me as might be thought proper, and then finish his study from an Italian model (a pretty girl that is made very much like me), mamma would not allow it. So, for the present, I am goddess with a nose and chin—the rest left to the spectator's imagination; but I am "breaking ground," as we say at the West, to *have my bust taken*, and so be done even more justice to, perhaps, after all. Most anything is proper in marble, you know. But of this I will write you hereafter.

Well, here I am at the bottom of my fourth page; and half my object, when I sat down to write, was to tell you all about Mr. Fane, whom I have scarce mentioned. But it will do for a letter by itself. So, good-night for now, dearest Kitty, and to bed will go

Yours for ever and ever,

'PHIA FIRKIN.

And here, dropping the curtain for the present, upon the Blivins side-scene in Paul's artistic life, we will pass to his more personal experiences in another chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was mid-forenoon; and (with a very unusual irregularity—for he made a religion of his Art, and ordinarily suffered no engagement of pleasure or ceremony to interrupt his habitual industry)—Paul was not at his studio. He paced up and down the little parlor of his lodgings, awaiting the carriage of the Princess C——, but with very conflicting feelings for his thought-company, meanwhile.

His own heart had called him to account. In his pocket was a letter from his mother—unopened. It had been brought him as he waited to fulfil the engagement of the morning; and, making the excuse to himself that probably there would not be time to read it before he should be called away, he had thus deferred what he never had deferred before.

But that letter had arrived just as he was summoned to the same bar of self-examination by another twinge of conscience. The princess had several times alluded to a young sculptor, Signor Valerio, in whom she was inter-

ested, and to whose retired and unvisited studio—hidden within that of the old sculptor Secchi, under whom he was studying—she wished some day to introduce him. And the note of this morning was to request Paul to stay at home till she should call and take him there. But what meant the uneasiness with which he waited to comply with this invitation? Why could he not go, with such a lover of Art as the princess, to give his admiration, with hers, to the genius of a youthful sculptor, without a jealous unwillingness so foreign to his usual generous appreciation?

As the rattle of wheels announced the stop of a rapidly driven carriage at the door, Paul stood self-convicted of two charges from which he was very glad to escape—first, a jealousy which betrayed a deeper interest in that lady than he had been willing to confess, and, second, a consciousness that to the nature of this jealous interest the mere presence of his mother's letter was a reproof. He dreaded that the reading of it might break the charm, even of the doubtful pleasure of that morning.

To get rid of an oppressive solitude, as well as to prevent the princess from waiting, Paul made haste below; but the well-appointed equipage was at the door without her. The footman's message was to say that her highness had been passing the morning at Signor Valerio's, and the carriage would bring Mr. Fane to her highness at the *Galeria Secchi*.

Away dashed those proud blood horses, and discontentedly alone upon the cushions of the luxurious britzka rode Paul. He was struggling to disbelieve and make light of his fascination by the princess; but that did not prevent his feeling something exceedingly like resentment, that she should have anticipated an engagement with himself in her eagerness to get earlier to his rival. His preparation to seem unconcerned, and the endeavoring to smother all that should interfere with a proper estimate of the sculptor's work and a liberal commendation of it, occupied quite all the time which it took the gay equipage to thread the narrow streets to its destination.

Signor Secchi, "the sculptor," was a venerable mediocrity, early in life mislabelled as a genius, and ever since proudly wearing the label, and executing occasionally an original work to keep up his theoretic belief in it—but showing what was his practical misgiving on the subject, by relying for subsistence on the making of copies. His large establishment for this mechanical production of statuary for the foreign markets was, of course, a great deal visited by strangers wishing to purchase; and, in this atmosphere of tangible celebrity, the oft-named and much-sought Secchi felt blissfully renowned.

It struck Paul that her highness's "tiger" seemed very much at home, as, on arriving, he led the way into the *galeria* of Signor Secchi; and, without asking for the

polite old sculptor, pursued his way past the larger workshops, and through passages and side-doors, to the hidden haunt of his pupil. The mysterious Signor Valerio must be very often visited, Fane thought, when the confidential servant knew the way so trippingly!

But, to what a luxurious studio was Paul suddenly introduced! The exquisitely softened light from above fell upon walls hung with draperies of green, while a large couch of green velvet, and a round table and *fauteuils*, covered with the same costly stuff, made a half *boudoir* under the window. There was no one in the room when he entered; and, as the door closed behind and left him in silence, he looked around with an increased tumult of wonder and jealousy. What a luxuriast must be this favorite Valerio!

He began to look closer at the artistic belongings of the place. In the centre stood a sculptor's easel, on which was a clay figure, covered with the wet cloth of suspended labor. On the side opposite the door, however, were two finished statues, of the size of life—one, a fugitive Daphne, with her face turned to the wall; and the other a prostrate Antinoüs, lying asleep at a fountain's lip. He was approaching these for a closer look, when the door opened behind him.

"Signor Valerio, at your service!" said a familiar voice; but as he turned, and, at the first glance, saw only a per-

son in the costume of an artist, he bowed inquiringly—the smile of the princess, the next moment, however, beaming out from under the rim of the slouched hat, and an incredulous glimpse of the whole mystification flashed upon him!

“And your friend, the sculptor?” he exclaimed, as he eagerly sprang forward to take the offered hand of the princess.

“*C'est moi!*” she deliberately pronounced—commencing with much gravity to make a courtesy, but suddenly remembering her present costume and the now visible machinery of that feminine performance, and with a slide to the right, performing a gentleman’s ceremonious bow.

Paul felt—he did not dare, for the moment, to ask himself why—boundlessly relieved. He looked around him with fresh eyes, and admiration inexpressibly more willing, as she described to him the secret culture of her artistic tastes in this chamber of enchantment.

“I did not confess this to you, when you first recognized the spirit that breathes here,” said the princess; “I let you misname me the *improvisatrice*—content with that, indeed, as it is the same inspired thought, whether it is breathed through words or marble. But I was not quite ready, at the time, to admit you to this inner sanctuary.”

"You doubted my capability of appreciating it," said Paul.

"No—for I saw, as I told you, that you were born with the soul of an artist; but every sacred temple has its vestibule, and a secret like this, you will allow, should have its vestibule of time."

"But there must be few of your friends, who, even by waiting, have gained the privilege of entrance here," he said, "for I am surprised never to have heard a hint of such a delicious mystery."

"My visits here have been constant, of course," said the princess; "yet, under the management of good old Secchi, the secret has been well kept. With the inquisitive underlings of his workshops, the inner studio passes for his own impenetrable sanctuary; and the works, which you see here, are cast and rough-hewn as his own—'Signor Valerio' being known but as the one confidential student admitted to his choicest instruction in the Art. As to my friends and acquaintances now in Florence, scarce one has ever entered here."

The princess, meantime, was unwinding the wet cloth from the figure on the easel; and (deferring for the moment his closer look at the statues) Paul went on with his inquiries into the intellectual portion of the mystery.

"With so exquisite a piece of work as this which you are unveiling," said he (for the admirable lines of a most

lovely figure, nearly completed, now became visible), "how are you content with secrecy? Can there be genius without fame? Would a star be a star, without the atmosphere by which to shine?"

"It is the contrary that seems wonderful to me," said the princess, as she took the slender moulding-pencils into her hands, and balanced one after another with the dextrous manipulation of habit—"how genius, particularly artistic genius, can consent to promiscuous publicity! It seems to me that the higher the conception of beauty, the more exclusive should be the admiration of it—the gaze of a vulgar or unappreciative eye being a profanation from which it shrinks, as if by simply a natural modesty."

"The higher beauties among birds and flowers have no such exclusiveness," said Paul, smiling.

"Human instincts are better authority than birds and flowers," she replied. "How instinctively does a beautiful woman veil herself from the vulgar eye! And genius, which is very feminine in its instincts, just so instinctively, I think (if it acted upon first impulse), would reserve its beauties for the few."

"But, to return to my simile," said Paul; "the light of the star is lost, unless the few and the many are shone upon together; and the influences of genius are as varied as the uses of starlight—the boor and his sweetheart promising to remember each other by the same star that

inspires the poet and instructs the astronomer. There are vile eyes, too, that look on the stars—as there are vile eyes that look on the works of genius—without profaning them.”

“I have embodied something of this feeling,” said the princess, without directly meeting Paul’s argument, “in my modelling of Daphne, here. The nymph” (she continued, crossing the room to where the beautiful statue stood, with its face turned to the wall) “is, according to mythology, flying from the god of day—Beauty shunning the world’s universal eye. Yet see how Nature has ordained that she shall thus appear no less beautiful! The limbs are seen to much better advantage, as she flies—the two arches with which the knotted hair joins to the neck, certainly intended to be admired, are thus brought into view—the fall of the shoulders from the wealth of shadow on the after part of the head, and the shaping of the waist, with those two exquisite dimples where the hips turn into the small of the back—these are perfections intended to give grace to beauty in its flight—are they not?”

“Why,” said Paul, laughing at the artistic earnestness with which the fair sculptress maintained her theory, “they are certainly perfections that might pass unobserved in a Venus who did not turn her back upon us!”

“You are a republican,” said the princess, “and mock at my argument for exclusiveness, of course—but I insist,

still, that the profaning many are to be fled from, Daphne fashion"—

"And from the Daphne motive, too—indifference to love?" asked Paul, with a smile.

"Yes—or it is just as well, at least, for the mythology of gossip to put that construction upon it—but still, though a Daphne is very likely to have a secret lover at the other end of her flight, Indifference is one of my ideals. In my Antinoïs, here, I have tried to express it," added the princess, pointing to the couchant statue on the left.

Paul approached nearer, and looked upon what he thought one of the most exquisite creations he had ever seen in marble. It was the figure of a youth who had fallen asleep after slaking his thirst at the fountain flowing past his lip—his arm thrown neglectfully over his head, the proportions of his form ethereally delicate, and an expression, both in the unalarmed abandonment of posture and in the delicately intellectual features, telling of a never-troubled spirituality of repose.

"But this divine model of Indifference—you have made it of our sex," said Paul, after gazing on it for some time in silent admiration.

"One of your sex, with the beauty of ours," said the princess, smiling; "for, spite of our self-love, it is a law of nature to love our opposites. Antinoïs was the type of

Indifference, because, being beautiful, like a woman, he loved no woman. But that was but a portion of what I thought of, in first conceiving it. My intention was to mould a being to whom both sexes had contributed their best—man his intellectuality and woman her grace and delicacy—but who, from this very perfection of equipoise between them, was passionless.”

“But, in the excessive beauty of this creation, you have made Indifference more attractive than it is in real life,” said Paul.

“I think not,” said the princess. “It is loved no less for not loving. We are not told what passion was inspired by the masculine attractions of Antinoüs—mythology stopping only to chronicle the passion inspired by his feminine attractions. The Emperor Hadrian built temples to deify this half of the perfect nature of Antinoüs. Indifference aside, however, we yearn to find all qualities in our ideals. It is for what genius borrows of woman, for instance, that I love it most.”

“Why,” said Paul, “I think our sex borrows more safely of yours than you of us. A man is beloved for being femininely tender of heart and delicate in his tastes and perceptions, but on a woman all masculinities sit ungracefully.”

The princess held up the skirt of her artistic tunic

with a look of inquiry ; and, as Paul looked at her in her male attire, he could not but confess that the inference to be drawn from his remark would be but true.

“In the intoxicating presence of these triumphs of your genius,” said he, slightly coloring, “it is of little importance how your outward person is attired ; but I must still own that I have seen your highness dressed more becomingly.”

“You shall drive home with me, by-and-by, then,” she said, “and dine with my turban, to remove the impression ; but come first and give me a criticism on my work in hand.”

“I had already found the features to be very like your own,” he said, as they turned to the nearly finished clay figure on the easel.

“The likeness to myself in feature, if any there be, is unintentional,” said the princess, “though the feeling embodied in it is, I will venture to tell you, a memory of my own. I call it *Hermione*—more to give it a name than to represent strictly the history of the Trojan princess—though that suggested the name, and it might be true of her, perhaps, at the period, when, loving *Orestes*, she is compelled to marry *Pyrrhus*. But I have endeavored to express in it the sudden death in the heart from the abandonment of hope—death even to blank uncon-

sciousness within, while the limbs and pulses are still unchanged in their outer presence of youth."

Paul looked in silence on the clay figure while the thoughtful artist, now interested again in her work, touched, with the imperceptible elaboration of her moulding pencil, the round of the forward thrown shoulder. It was a nude form, more slight than is common in statuary, though in the fullness of completed development as a woman. The posture was one of suddenly relaxed impulse, the clasped hands fallen, with the fingers half loosening their hold, the head dropped upon the bosom, and the partially dishevelled hair dividing upon the shoulders. The poetic meaning of the conception—beauty unchanged except by the utter withdrawal of all expression of what it had lived for—the lamp unbroken but unlit—was carried out, Paul thought, with a fineness of discrimination possible only to inspired genius. But there was an expression in the statue to which his mind kept returning; and of which he tried in vain to understand the secret. In that nude figure, abandoned forgetfully to the support of muscles unsustained but by instinct—the character of every line and nerve made completely natural by a pervading palsy of grief—there was still a look of high birth unmistakable. With the features half hidden by the droop of the head, the limbs undraped, the hair dishevelled, and a

woe-stricken prostration of all movement of pride or grace, there breathed through it all, unchanged, the something which told of a king's daughter. The distinction was as marked, between this and the models by other hands, as between the air and manner of the princess-artist herself, and the other sculptors of Florence. Now wherein lay this rank which nothing could unclothe? In what subtle difference of line or mould was hid this escutcheon of presence?

Paul found words, after a while, to express what was his embarrassment in the study of the sad Hermione; and the princess, to whom the remark seemed new, entered with him upon an analysis of the proportions of the figure—without success, however, as to the solution of the problem in his mind.

“Even without the likeness to your own features,” he said, “it would have seemed to me that your own undeniable presence breathes through the complete whole—as recognisable as a spirit-portrait might be to spirit-eyes.”

“It is natural, of course,” she musingly said, as she retouched the figure, here and there, while under criticism, “that one's own nature, whatever it be, should impress itself on the model as one works. It is the escape, indeed, of a fermenting identity, which might else, I should think, become an agony. The air I breathe scarce seems to me more necessary, in that respect, than the Art on which I

slake this thirst for self-transfusion. Love or maternity—perhaps family cares or charity—may be the escape-valve for other women. I have tried these, each in its turn—but they were not enough. Without the something more—deeper and stronger even than love—which this impassioned study of Art gives to me, I have a prisoner within my inmost soul, who would madden with solitary confinement. It is not wonderful, therefore, that you trace a likeness to me in what is thus born of the breath of my soul's heart—though that scarce explains to you, after all, by what lines of the pencil is given the expression of blood and birth.”

The discussion reverted again to the other statues, and from a critical analysis of the Antinoüs, Paul picked out, in that creation also, proofs of the fascinating artist's unconscious reproduction of herself. And so, with but the interruption of a lunch of sherbet and fruits, passed that noon and afternoon like a dream away! The two minds were at home together in that luxurious studio and its enchantments. Paul ceased to find fault with the male costume of the gifted woman, when he found how thoroughly and enthusiastically she became an artist with that convenient outward transformation—how magically complete was the sculptress, with those firmly held pencils of boxwood, and the light shaded from those earnest eyes with the slouched

hat! In the glow of her genius she forgot, and almost made Paul forget, the woman and the princess.

With the beginning of gold in the lessening light of the afternoon, the slight fingers threw down their pencils, and the pleasures to be found outside that little world of Art were reluctantly remembered. The princess retired to her dressing room to reappear in her costume better known; and as the sun set over Florence, the two artists—Paul irresistibly happy with the spells thus magically wove around him—were driven rapidly out of the gate toward Fiesolé, on their way to their *tête-à-tête* dinner at the Villa G——.



CHAPTER XIV.

PAUL's thoughts, on the morning after his *tête-à-tête* dinner with the princess, were not, where they might easily have been, amid the memories of that bewildering day. In the visit to the strangely hidden studio of the eccentric sculptress and in the few dream-like hours which he had afterwards passed at her luxurious villa, there were remembrances enough to give full employment to a mind at leisure; but he was doubly pre-occupied, that morning and with things very differently exciting.

On the table before him, as he dressed, lay two missives, either of which, without the other, would have been sufficient to monopolize his attention—the letter from his mother, which he had read, after his return home, the night before; and a note from Miss Paleford, just received, and running thus:

DEAR MR. FANE:

Papa has commissioned me to act as his amanuensis, his only hand being disabled by the neuralgic trouble to which he is liable, and I obey—only with a little uncommissioned variation of my own.

A young gentleman, the son of one of our old friends and neighbors in England, has arrived in Florence, and we have just received a note from him through the post. As papa will not be well enough to see him to-day, he wishes me to endeavor to time the visit more conveniently by inviting him to tea to-morrow evening. But it occurred to me, that, as a stranger, he might not readily find the way to us without a guide; and that perhaps you would not object to give us the pleasure of your company the same evening, and bring him with you. At the embassy reception to-night, you will meet this gentleman (Mr. Ashly—I liked to have forgotten to mention his name) and any one will introduce you; so that you can propose and arrange it. Pray do not disappoint us. We shall look for you at our usual early tea-hour, and, meantime, dear Mr. Fane, I remain

Yours very truly,

SYBIL PALEFORD

The nerve out of tune in Paul's heart was struck by that well-remembered name. And the excitement was not alone from what it recalled—the cold eye from which he had received his first humiliation. One evening at the Palefords, the conversation turning upon their home associations in England, there had been a chance mention of the Ashlys as their wealthiest neighbors; and, by a question or two, he identified them with those he had seen. The young Mr. Ashly, now in Florence, he knew also, was the eldest son, and heir to the large fortune of the old and proud family.

Miss Paleford's note was flattering—assuming, as it did, that there could be no doubt of the agreeableness, to Mr. Ashly, of the proposed frank offer of a service from the new acquaintance; and, had the stranger borne any other name, Paul would have taken this for granted without giving it a second thought. But, with the mere name of Ashly came a vague presentiment of a slight; while the compliance with the lady's request would be an infringement upon a rule he had laid down for himself on his first landing in Europe—one by which his sensitive pride might shelter itself from the possibility of mortification by rebuff—that he would ask an introduction to no one. Thus far it had been carefully observed. His acquaintances had been either wholly incidental, or they were such as had made the first advance. To break this

rule at all would be the sacrifice of a broad and comprehensive generality, which, always to be able to assert was to have a weapon in reserve; but, to break it—now, and for the first time—for an Ashly, and *her* brother!

Still, the refusal of a request so simple, and made by Miss Sybil herself, was not to be thought of. It must be a better reason, indeed, than a whimsical and unconfessed sensitiveness of his own, that should stand in the way of his shielding his invalid friend, Colonel Paleford, from an inconvenience. The manner in which he was to perform the duty was the only question; and, with a thought which occurred to him on this point, he took his hat and crossed the Square to the lodgings of an English acquaintance.

Being a close student of men, as well as of the gentler sex, Paul had become interested, very soon after his arrival in Florence, in an Englishman who, by his own countrymen, was called “a character.” This gentleman, Mr. Tetherly, was a bachelor of about fifty years of age, who had lived all his life independently idle, upon a small but certain income—for the last few years having taken up his permanent residence in Florence as the most economical and agreeable capital of Europe, and being now known, at the *cafés* and elsewhere, as one of the “fixtures.” He was first pointed out to Paul as the man who had refused to be presented at court—the English

ambassador having taken a great fancy to him, and proposing it, but Mr. Tetherly declining on the ground that he was the son of a tradesman, not presentable at his own court at home, and therefore not entitled to it abroad. The diplomatic official, liking him no less for this independence, had persevered in cultivating him, however, and, by frequent invitation and attention, he had gradually become one of the *habitués* of the English embassy.

Between Paul and him there had grown up, from their first introduction, a cordial understanding. Meeting constantly at the *cafés* and restaurants, and lingering in talk, when they thus had the chance opportunity, as well as in society, they soon needed nothing of a friendship but the avowing it—just the point of intimacy, either in love or friendship, where Mr. Tetherly's cautious reserve brought him usually to a stand-still. Exactly to know his own place and keep it, was his hobby; and though his education at an English university, and his long experience abroad, had so liberalized him that his speciality was never obtrusive, it was still his secret habit of mind, never intermitted or forgotten. Among ladies—with whom his kindheartedness, wit, and refinement made him a favorite—he kept always his sentry-thought in the background, making sure that he was falling into no manner of illusion; and, among men, he was perpetually measuring his own value,

and questioning and anatomizing every civility and approach.

But while of the misanthropy that only measures and depreciates others he had none—his rule and plummet being applied only with perpetual comparison to himself—Mr. Tetherly was the best of reference and authority as to social distinctions, and niceties of observance and conduct. To Paul, with his republican newness to that part of foreign life which was artificial, this was an invaluable quality in a mind to which he had daily access; and it was therefore with a happy sense of relief that he now turned to his English friend for advice as to the execution of Miss Paleford's commission.

"Just in time for a cup of tea, my dear Fane!" exclaimed the bachelor, as Paul opened the door. "I was that moment comforting my loneliness with offering one to the Baronet. Down You-Sir! and give that chair to Mr. Fane!"

Mr. Tetherly was breakfasting alone—or rather with his usual companion, a very sagacious Scotch terrier, seated upright in the opposite chair, his paws on the edge of the table, and his eyes fixed with nervous attentiveness on his master. The hairy countenance of the animal was really intelligent enough to talk to, as was the solitary Englishman's habit, and he understood much that was said to him, and looked as if he understood all of it! His name of

"You-Sir" was an abbreviation, or rather a variation, of that under which he came to his present owner—a certain baronet's coachman, of whom he was bought, having given the pup the title of his own master, Sir John—"The Baronet" his name, "*You-Sir*," for shortness, as Tetherly expressed it. With nothing to occupy him, and his peculiarities preventing his forming even an intimacy which should make any demand on his time, the leisure of the bachelor was divided pretty equally between his books and the education of his favorite dog.

"Allow me to wonder at this lonely breakfast of yours," said Paul, as he took the vacated seat—the terrier becoming his *vis-à-vis*, by occupying his master's lap, with his paws again on the edge of the table—"you might so easily come round to the *café*, and give us the pleasure of your company every morning."

"I have thought of it," replied his friend, hesitating, and evidently making some little effort of frankness, before finishing the sentence, "but the fact is I can't afford it."

"Surely," said Paul, looking at the well-spread table, "you could breakfast for much less"—

"Pardon me," interrupted Tetherly, "I forgot that you were not aware of what I am obliged to economize most. It is not money, but self-esteem, that I was thinking of saving. I get tired of myself if I begin too early—or, rather, I need to feel like a flower new-blown, or a gentle-

man fresh from silence and solitude, to fancy myself agreeable to people. Don't you think, yourself, that a man who has breakfasted out, comes stale and second-hand, for instance, to a dinner-party?"

"Why," said Paul, laughing, "I might confess to a more sentimental cherishing of the same idea. It has often occurred to me that marriage, if it had no other privilege than that of breakfasting alone with a beloved woman, would be an invaluable happiness—looking into her eyes when first opened after the sacredness of sleep—hearing her voice with the first words uttered after dream-talk with angels. Night, it always seemed to me, re-hallows the presence and re-virgins the beauty of woman."

"Um!—that is putting rather too fine an edge upon it," said Tetherly, smiling at Paul's poetical innocence, "or, at least, I never came so near breakfasting, that way, with a nice woman, as to inquire what made it agreeable. But I mean to say that, as a social principle, common to both sexes, privacy is dignifying; and the more recent our arrival from it, or the more impregnated is our presence with the known fact or the effects of it, the more precious our company to others."

"Yes," said Paul, whose artistic finger of thought was immediately laid upon the nice line of the definition, "I have once or twice in my life seen faces which owed their charm to that expression—looking always sacredly fresh

from privacy—and it has occurred to me whether it might not be cultivated as a beauty.”

“A flushed face is the opposite of it,” said Tetherly, “and that is, perhaps, why paleness gives so distinguished a look. Calmness of countenance might be cultivated; and so might the unwinking or unalarmed tranquillity of eye which betokens thoughts coming reluctantly from elsewhere; and then the tone of voice might express something of it, both by slower enunciation and by being pitched a half-note lower than the key of the conversation around.

“It would require to be so well done,” said Paul, “that it must be classed among the reserved weapons of the gifted. A failure at it would be blank stupidity. Fortunately there is beauty which can belong, thus, to only Nature’s picked people.”

“And what is to console the *unpicked*?” asked Tetherly—both he and Paul lapsing into a reverie of a moment or two, the silence of which was broken, at last, by the barking of the terrier.

“Silence, You-Sir!” quietly said the master, as he reprov- ingly pulled the ear of his dog; “pray pardon the Baronet’s lack of discrimination, my dear Fane! He has been taught to vary conversation, when visitors are dull, by barking in the ‘awkward pauses.’ He did not appreciate the resting on our oars while thought was under headway.”

"If he lack discrimination, he lacks what his master is very rich in," replied Paul, laughing at the novelty of dog-supply for the gaps of conversation; "and, if you will pardon the digression, my dear Tetherly, it is just that volume of wisdom which I have called to consult, this morning."

"A poor oracle, my dear fellow, but it shall at least be vocal at your summons. What is the myth?" The eccentric bachelor smiled and looked genially happy, as he always did, when there was a chance to do a kindness.

"You will laugh at the commonplaceness of my 'myth,'" said Paul. "To you it is as little of a mystery, probably, as the meaning of a fence or a hedge; yet please remember that *what is shut in and shut out* by English hedges and fences, might, at first, puzzle the Arab who had ridden his blood barb or his camel, only in the unfenced desert."

"And to what Yankee Sahara are you willing to 'own up, then, my dear republican?" asked Tetherly, with a remembrance of some of their former arguments on the respective perfections of their native countries.

"Social distinctions," answered Paul—"or that part of them which may be described as the *ethics of introductions between gentlemen*. We are a prairie on this subject, as yet—with here and there an obstinate squatter, perhaps, or a temporary encampment."

"Do you mean to inquire what gives a right to an introduction, then?"

As Paul hesitated a moment, turning over in his mind how he might best present the handle of his dilemma, "You-Sir " broke the silence with his inquisitive bark.

"*Bow*, says the baronet, you observe," replied Paul ("though, with a slight stammer, he prolongs it into *bow-wow*"), and he is right, as far as he goes. But it is what we *bow to*, that I am seeking light upon—what is implied or involved, that is to say, in the asking of an introduction."

"Well, then—to begin at the beginning—it means that you desire the person's acquaintance."

"But, does the request claim equality, or does it confess inferiority?"

"Of course it is asked as a favor—and, so far, it is an admission of lacking something yourself which the other has power to bestow—a favor sometimes overbalanced, however, by the compliment of asking."

"Yet, is there not, after thus taking the position of applicant, a certain irreversible inferiority, likely always to be remembered in the mutual consciousness of intercourse, and certain to be appealed to, in case of a collision of dignity or other quarrel?"

"Why, I begin to comprehend how there might be

very tangled roots to the question; though the common 'flower of courtesy,' above ground, seems at first glance to be very simple. Let us see! There may be such a thing as equality so well understood between two persons, that the asking an introduction is a mere convenience—like turning out for each other on the sidewalk."

"That, in our republic, is the general understanding of the matter."

"Then there is a homage to eminence of any kind—to genius and achievements such as have given a position separate from rank or wealth—and, in seeking introductions to such men, the question of relative position does not come up."

"Two points disposed of," said Paul.

"We come now to differences of rank such as are accidental or unachieved—men of old families and new, commoners and noblemen, gentlemen and tradesmen, the more rich and the less, the professional and industrial classes."

"And how—between these?"

"Why, each individual case would have its modifications. An introduction, asked for merely the pleasure of acquaintance, might chance to confer, in almost any case, more than it sought."

"But is it not common in England and on the continent, for a man of inferior position, but still mingling in the

same society, to ask an introduction where the acquaintance is to be an understood condescension on the other's part—so admitted at the time, so acknowledged ever after?"

"Certainly—very common."

"And where the different shades of position are doubtful, or so near that they might otherwise be disputed, does not the seeking of the acquaintance of one man by another, amount to an admission of the other's inferiority?"

"Why, it might be so construed, without a doubt."

"And there, I take it then, is just the point where the American and English feeling would divide. Our people would not accept of introductions in society on these terms."

"The desert-bred Arab, you mean to say, on coming to England, instead of following the roads like an Englishman, would ride across the country as he has been accustomed to do, paying no regard to hedges or fences!"

"An illustration that contains a forcible argument, I admit," said Paul. "And the difference between the two countries (monarchical distinctions in one and republican equality in the other), fully accounts for the difference of feeling in the matter. But, till we have the substance we are not likely to observe the shadow—and, till we submit to monarchy and rank, we are likely to insist on intercourse with all people as their equals."

"And so I am sure you are fully allowed to do," said

Tetherly. "It is understood in all continental society, I believe, that having no rank, the American may mingle with any rank suitable to his education and manners. Your countrymen have no reason to complain. But, after all, these are vague generalities, from which the deductions to suit any particular case might be very unreliable. And, by the way, if I may ask the question, to what particular circumstances are you applying our argument?—for something seems to have given you more than a theoretic interest in the matter."

Paul mentioned Miss Paleford's commission, and the necessity it put him under, of breaking his own rule as to asking introductions, still reserving to himself, however, the secret which linked a separate nervousness with the stranger's name.

"Why, of course, the man will be very happy indeed to accept of your offer to take him out there," said Tetherly, smiling at what he evidently thought to be a very needless sensitiveness on the subject, "but I can manage the introduction for you, if that is all, so that, at least, *he* will never know of your asking it. I am to meet him at dinner at the embassy to-day; and at the *soirée* afterwards, you can come up when you see me talking with him. I will introduce you simply as a friend of mine whom I wish him to know. Will that do?"

Paul felt more relieved than he could explain to his

friend, for the apt and ready suggestion; but his thanks were very abundant, and he took his leave with half the load, at least, gone from his heart. Too uneasy, still, for his accustomed work, he took his mother's letter for company, and, in the lonely and luxurious solitudes of the duke's gardens, wiled away, with meditative idleness, the day that was to precede the evening of trial

CHAPTER XV.

PAUL's mother's letter had lain open on the table while he was dressing for the *soirée* at the English embassy, and it was with somewhat a complex feeling that he now gave himself up to it for five minutes before going out for the evening. In any newly opened letter from her hand, there was the presence of a guardian spirit which he had hesitated to confront with his promise of adventure of the evening before—delaying therefore the reading of this one till he should have returned from the visit with the princess to the mysterious artist—but it was not altogether as a delinquent trying to make amends for a neglect, that he now re-conned the already well-studied syllables. There was another very

important ministration, for which the spirit of his mother's letters had grown, insensibly, with his European experiences, to be the reliance. Though a general human want for which it thus furnished the supply, it was so far American that it was one to which the atmosphere of monarchical countries for the first time made him sensitive.

The more sacred world than society—the something of his own to which all the exterior of his present life should be secondary—was the need which he found supplied in those letters. He read his thoughts back into his mother's presence, before going out, to be reassured of what, more precious than the errand out of doors, he had to come home to. The association so constantly with those who had rank, station or resources, like nests to which they could at any moment return—to whom society was but the air when idly on the wing—had awakened in Paul's mind, gradually, a dread of the heart-sinking sense of vagrancy. To be everywhere the stranger—only recognised as passing, and with no value on which, at will, to stop, and within which to entrench privacy, strengthen resources and suffice for oneself—this seemed to him the phantom of dread with which low spirits, for a traveller so nameless as himself, stood ever ominously prepared. There could be no smother sailing, it was true, than he had everywhere found it,

and all, at present, seemed a summer sea—but he must have chart and compass for voyage and venture of his own, if need were, or he was adrift upon European society as upon a plank in mid-ocean.

Bound, for the evening, to a scene where his habitual welcome was particularly friendly and familiar, there was still to be an encounter with eyes akin to the first that had ever looked coldly on him (an introduction to an Ashly)—and it was perhaps with the vague shadow of association with this name that Paul lingered more sensitively than usual over what was dearest to him. He once more turned to make certain upon what better treasure, than his errand *without*, he was to lock the door of memory *within*. Thus ran the concluding pages with which his mother wound up her gossip of home matters :

* * * Your accounts of gaieties and intimacies are very amusing, and, to us at this distance at least, they seem to be throwing very attractive spells upon you as you pass. And this is to be rejoiced in. The world should be thanked for smiling upon us, if it will. But, in these glittering eddies along the shore, we should not forget the main current of our life, and you particularly, may as well be reminded, perhaps, that your arrival at the far outlet of ambition and culture is to be by a headway slow and unnoticed. You have but the force of the natural channel to trust for guidance and progress, and are just so often hindered

and thrown into the slack-water of inaction, as you are made giddy by any side-whirls, or excitements such as are objectless and temporary.

Of course, my dear son, you are keeping aware of what there is for yourself to learn among the gay and dazzling scenes to which you have temporary access. Technical and professional knowledge is not all that is necessary for an artist; an acquaintance with beauty, in all its varieties; of shape and culture, and with taste in all its caprices and modifications implies a knowledge of human character and manner only got by a certain conversance with the life and society around you. But much as there *is* thus *for you*, in those foreign circles of fashion and gaiety, there is more that *is not for you*—far more that is held out to you quite as temptingly, but which even they who tempt you are not aware how worse than a burden it would be for you to accept.

The wisdom enough for any one day, or its choice of conduct, my dear Paul, will come easy. With your own position kept in mind, your one object in travel never lost sight of, and the hopes of a self-dependent and industrial career kept modest and truthful, you may always decide what will teach or profit you anything—very often deciding quite differently, indeed, from kind friends who overrate or misconceive you. What advantages come openly and legitimately, or would only come more readily were your entire circumstances known, may be safely accepted; while pleasure or advancement that is in any manner dependent on a false position, or that may by any chance be thought not to have naturally belonged to you, is carefully to be shunned. ¶

You see how your own gay letter has furnished the text for my grave sermon. I could not read of your daily mingling with persons of such different rank in life, without spinning my cobweb of

possibilities, and fancying many a tangle of embarrassment. It still occurs to me, however, that your rallying-point in a chance difficulty of position might better be self-respect than the humility I was preaching to you, though of that you must yourself be the judge. To a reserved pride in your own natural qualities and elevated pursuits you are well entitled; and, while this need claim nothing in the way of honor from others, it might still remind you of an elevation at which to forget annoyance from those naturally beneath you. The lark does not sing the less because the swan called him an upstart as he rose.

I am taking great comfort in sweet Mary Evenden in your absence. She comes and works upon your easel while I gossip beside her with my needle, and it is very certain (I think I may trust my unskillful eye to pronounce) that her patient pencil will be once more within reach of companionship when you return. She mourns very much that your studies are not such as you can send home, enabling her to get hints from time to time of the direction of your progress. Your absence, she thinks, would have no estrangement in it, if with your mind she could but thus be kept familiar. The chatty letters we get are not from that portion of you which she knew best—the Paul of whose genius she loved the features—and she is only afraid of being outgrown by this inner physiognomy which is thus lost sight of while fastest maturing.

I do not know whether I should add to this, by the way, that there is a chance of your seeing Mary in Florence. Mrs. Cleverly is at present talking of a year in Europe, and if the dear kind lady should go, she will take our old pastor's daughter as her companion. The twin nurture with your own mind which the sweet girl might thus be able to resume, would be an inexpressible hap-

piness to her, and though I scarce know how I should bear to have you both absent, it is a good news of which I sincerely hope to send you the confirmation. Two such beloved ones breathing together in the artistic air of Italy ! How I should long to be with you ! * * *

It was with his inner eyes thus brightened—his consciousness of a life, for which another sky furnished him with the light and air, renewed and made familiar—that Paul drew on his gloves and strolled slowly out to his evening's engagement. The stars seemed looking deep down betwixt the overhanging eaves into the dim-lit streets of Florence, and the passers-by were few ; the rattle of now and then a rapidly driven carriage over the smooth pavement being almost the only sound that broke upon the night air in that quarter of palaces ; but there was unseen company for at least one lingering foot-passenger along the dark streets. Paul turned from one of the narrower cross thoroughfares, and entered upon the glare of the porch-way, where the equipages were dashing in and out with the guests for the festivities at the English Embassy, not feeling that, in his own solitary walk hither, he had loitered through the hushed shadows altogether alone.

Dancing was not yet commenced ; but the band were playing waltzes, and the promenading couples were beginning to take their range through the formidable length of the ball-room. The guests of the small dinner-party which

had preceded the general reception, were just from table ; and one of the two or three strangers who were gathered immediately around the ambassador, Paul supposed must be Mr. Ashly. After making his bow to the lady of the house, he made the tea-tray an errand for approaching this group of gentlemen ; and it needed but half a look for his well-prepared eye to select the face which should be the brother's of her whom he had such occasion to remember ! There was the same cold grey eye, and the same passionless and imperturbable pallor of complexion, with the curl of the lip, even in repose objective and contemptuous. In figure, Mr. Ashly was slight and tall, well dressed, and of a distinguished look quite unmistakable. Spite of the ungenial character given to his first presence by the unconscious superciliousness that was evidently habitual to him, a second look at his thorough-bred outline and *maintien* would scarce fail to find him very intellectually handsome.

After shaking hands with the ambassador, Paul fell into conversation with an acquaintance who was one of the group, and, seeing Tetherly occupied at a little distance with a lady, he thought he would thus wait his time till that friend should come along, as proposed, for the incidental introduction. He observed directly, however, that Mr. Ashly was taken aside by Sir Cummit Strong, who had been one of the dinner-guests at the Embassy, and, if he was not very much mistaken, he was himself pointed out

to the stranger immediately after. Of what interest he could be to either of them, thus far, he could not understand, though he had once or twice of late chanced to be the object of a preference by his countrywoman, Miss Firkin, to the temporary discomfiture of Sir Cummit; and Blivins had mentioned to him that Miss 'Phia's English admirer and his female ally, Lady Highsnake, spoke not very lovingly of the *attaché* in his absence. Even if the baronet attributed his unsuccessfulness of suit to Paul's hindrance, however, there could be no sufficient reason for calling a stranger's attention so directly to the offender.

By a movement among the company, a moment after, the gentlemen in that quarter of the room were drawn into a circle around the ambassadress, and, at the same instant that Paul discovered himself in close neighborhood to the stranger, her frank ladyship chose to remove the ceremony from between them by the exercise of her privilege as hostess.

"Mr. Ashly, Mr. Fane," and, for the moment, it appeared as if those chance-uttered words had removed the only obstacle to the fulfilment of the commands of the lovely Sybil.

But there was a sudden check to the impulse with which Paul was about to follow up the first phrase of courtesy with an allusion to their mutual acquaintance, and her commission for the morrow evening. To the smile on his own

lip there was no answer ! With the Englishman's recovery of position from the bow which civility required, there was an evident limit to the introduction. It was the Ashly look again which Paul felt in the passive-lidded turn of that reluctant eye upon him ! And, by a just perceptible compression of the supercilious lip, the expression was unmistakably confirmed.

One of the reigning belles of the court of Florence fell into the line of Paul's look at the moment, and to give her an arm for a waltz was the sudden diversion of purpose with which he covered the embarrassment of the smile so suddenly checked ; and, as he glided away to the measure of the enchanting music, leaving Mr. Ashly with an apparent recognition of their introduction which seemed only more careless than his own, he found time to struggle with the phantom that so strangely had re-found to re-haunt him.

What could be the barb in the repetition, now, of that slight so trifling ? Why should that sister's unintentional indifference be turned in the wound like a poisoned arrow by the brother's still more unimportant coldness in a civility ? How, was Miss Ashly not forgotten ? Why should the brother or his acquaintance outlast, to-night, in Paul's mind, a single turn of the waltz with that titled beauty upon his arm ? A whole court present, with whose throngs

of rank and talent to be familiarly friendly, and yet all made inscrutably valueless by the indifference of one undistinguished stranger!

The waltz over, and the conspicuous countess and her bouquet taking breath together at the head of the room, Paul took advantage of the approach of an admirer or two, and made his escape from the glaring rooms to the fresh air of one of the balconies over the garden. He was joined here by Tetherly, after a few minutes.

"This is diplomatic air, my dear fellow," he said; "but we are not all born to it! At least my proposed dodge in your service has been too slow; for, remembering your American scruple about introductions, and finding occasion to practise a little ambassadorial reserve in the exercise of your commission, I was just coming to you for further instructions when I saw you introduced without me."

"Then, perhaps the reason for your reserve will explain the manner of the gentleman, said Paul, "for his evident unwillingness to accept of her ladyship's courtesy prevented my even speaking to him of Miss Paleford—the only use I had for his acquaintance, you know."

"Not too fast, my boy!—though I think the lady's errand must, in any case, go unperformed. You could not well offer Mr. Ashly the civility of a drive with his present impression of you. But let us distribute the blame a little more justly than you are likely to do!"

"Among Yankees, generally, do you mean?" asked Paul, with a smile.

"Why, your belonging across the water made the matter a little easier no doubt," said Tetherly, with a deprecating inclination of his head, "and my own remark at the dinner-table, which proved suggestive of what I wish to enlighten you upon, was complimentary enough to your people to provoke a rejoinder."

"Thanks, for your championship," said Paul; "but of what shape was Mr. Ashly's rejoinder?"

"Now we come to your mistake, my dear Fane! The rejoinder was from another person, and its sentiment was not agreed in by Mr. Ashly—but though he could dissent from the speaker on the general question, as he did very quietly and decidedly as to American qualities, he could say nothing in reply to Sir Cummit's personal disparagement of you."

"What, abused by the stiff old baronet?" asked Paul, with a laugh.

"Then you are quite sure it's of no consequence?" said Tetherly, a little inquisitively.

"As far as his own opinion goes, not the least in the world—his own nor the opinion of the ninety-nine in a hundred who are like him. But," added Paul, after a moment, "even such a dull abuser may be listened to by refined ears. What said he to Mr. Ashly?"

"May I own now, that your distinction is a little inexplicable," asked Tetherly, "though I confess that its discovery has relieved somewhat of the embarrassment of my feeling—the opinion of so passing a stranger as this simple Mr. Ashly of such interest to you, while that of the baronet, who is so much more consequential a personage hereabouts, is of no importance at all?"

Paul balanced for an instant the unconfessed secret that gave the eye of that passing stranger its caprice of power, but despairing of making it understood, or, more probably, dreading the self-ridicule that might follow his bringing it from the shadow of his own mind fairly to the light, he let the remark pass in silence.

Tetherly went on to explain the conversation at the dinner-table. Miss Paleford's exceeding beauty had come under discussion, and, by way of preparing the ground for introduction to Paul and the coming excursion, he had alluded to him as a friend of Colonel Paleford's, but in a general mention of the Americans at Florence. The allusion had been quite enough to draw down a torrent of abuse from Sir Cummit. He thought little of Americans in Europe, generally; but made out Colonel Paleford's friend, more particularly to be a humbug—"a color-grinder to a portrait-painter by the name of Blivins, travelling about with a diplomatic title on his passport, pretending, for the present, to make his addresses to the rich Miss Firkin!"

Tetherly had waited for the stormy baronet to give him an opportunity to take his friend's part; but at the height of his unaccountable tirade, he had observed the ambassador rising from the table; and so Mr. Ashly had gone into the drawing-room with rather one-sided impressions of Mr. Fane's desirableness as an acquaintance.

"I am sorry I do not *look* a refutation of the baronet's slanders or disparagements," said Paul, still writhing under the infliction of the slight by that eye of mysterious power; "but there is at least an error or so, that may be corrected, and about this I will call on you in the morning. Meantime, my dear Tetherly, here are bright eyes looking for you, I can see, and so you shall say good night to things as mirth-killing as my troubles. *Allons!*"

And, taking his friend's arm into the drawing room, Paul left him with a lady of their mutual acquaintance, and made his own way back to his own busy thought-world at home.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was a week after the evening described in the previous chapter, and the sun of an Italian June had risen (her father thought, suitably) upon the birth-day of Sybil Paleford. At any rate, there need be no finer morning for the birth-day of anything mortal—and mortal (against the general impression) Colonel Paleford thought his daughter might very possibly be. Everything out-of-doors seemed just as luxuriously lodged as anything in-doors. Happiness was as sheltered in the cobbler's unwindowed stall as in the duke's double-shuttered and costly-curtained palace.

"Because you are going to breakfast in the country at dinner-time," said Bosh, as his friend played with his spoon rather daintily, "it is no reason why you should not breakfast in the city at breakfast-time. Come, eat a roll, my dear Paul, if only for bread-and-butter corroboration that I have you back again."

Blivins and Paul had taken their place at one of the marble tables on the sidewalk in front of the *café*, and,

with dozens of artists and travellers, they were having their morning meal served to them in the street. The fragrant coffee and the tempting dish were within full enjoyment, at least, of the beggar's sight and smell. Fair, too, looked the baskets of the flower girls. And the mirror-covered walls of the *café*, all open to the public thoroughfare as they were, gave even the beggars back a copy of their beauty.

"I see Tetherly coming yonder," said Paul, "and he has been doing an errand for me this morning, about which I wish to have a chat with him alone. So, my dear Bosh, get off to your studio, and do not expect me there to-day. The breakfast party at Paleford's will last till sun-set, I dare say, and I will look in upon you at the Firkins' box at the opera, if I do not see you before. No more idle days after this."

And off up the street went the compliant Bosh, affectionately, without hesitation or question, as the sturdy and wholesome-looking Englishman, with his checked cravat and short hair, approached from the hotel neighborhood of the Arno.

"Pardon me, if I refresh the gift of speech with a cup of coffee," said he, taking Bosh's vacated chair and giving Paul's hand a shake with the two fingers he had to spare from his stick, "though my exhaustion is not far from what I have said. It's what I *haven't said* that has used me up,

my dear Fane? How do diplomatists sustain nature under political silence, I should like to know?"

"Then you found Mr. Ashly at home?" asked Paul, as the beckoned Botega held high his silver pots, and poured the hot milk and the coffee in two well-aimed cataracts at the cup."

"Yes—though, if you had not wished him to be enlightened on the subject, before meeting him, to-day, I should have sent up my card rather later. Like yourself, though engaged to breakfast out, he was breakfasting quietly before starting, however—quite ready for a call, but evidently surprised at seeing me so early."

"But it passed for a mere call of ceremony, I hope?"

"Yes—if my diplomacy has been successful, that is to say. I made myself out to be on a chance errand at his hotel, and apologized for killing two birds with one stone by giving him a call in passing. We gossiped for an hour on indifferent matters, and it was only when I rose to go that I mentioned you quite incidentally—remarking that the baronet, whom he had heard abusing you so at the embassy, had taken all that back."

"And he had no glimmer of suspicion, you think, that it was news meant especially for him?"

"No—the duel passed for an item of gossip only. He hardly seemed to remember you, to tell you the truth, and there was the tight place for my self-command! To

know that you had taken a whole week of trouble, and perilled life and liberty, to set a man right who had misinformed him as to your character, and then to see him dismiss the whole subject with half a wink of attention! Why, I came near bursting from a mere suppression of knowledge! But, tell me, my dear fellow—unless there is some very mysterious reason in the background (and, of course, you are at liberty to keep your secret, if there is)—are you not putting rather an eccentric value on the good opinion of this Mr. Ashly?”

“I should fail to make you understand,” said Paul, after a moment’s hesitation; “for I am not sure that I understand it altogether myself—how it is that I look to that man’s cold grey eye for recognition of my quality as a gentleman. A circumstance, connected with his family, has made that so, however. While I neither like the man, nor wish anything from him, his opinion on the fineness of my clay, as a superior or inferior human being, is irresistibly and inevitably beyond appeal. Yet to be of any value to me, in the way of approval, it must be wholly uninfluenced and instinctive; and therefore it was, that I wished for a man of nice honor, like yourself, to entrust with my justification. I needed that Mr. Ashly should be simply and barely put right as to the facts of my position, and that, beyond this, he should hear no praise of my character which could any way influence his judgment. So I

instructed you, and so I was very sure you would do. He will meet me now, to-day, thanks to you, with an unconscious freedom from prejudice—a *tabula rasa* on which to receive a fair natural impression.”

Paul’s eyes dropped upon the table, as if, from thinking aloud, he had fallen into a reverie.

“The longer I live, the more respect I have for what can be seen but by one pair of eyes,” said Tetherly, looking kindly and earnestly upon his friend, and commencing in a tone of voice which had none of his habitual raillery; “a man has oftenest good reason for an idiosyncrasy; but, will you excuse me, if I tell you how your present whim looks, from my outside point of view; it seems to me simply like a monomania, and one over which you would do better to get the mastery. It will be putting you, else, to endless inconvenience. I am, perhaps, a better judge of my countryman, Mr. Ashly, than you (who have never been in England) would naturally be, and I assure you he is not the authority on such points that you would make him. He is a gentlemanly man enough, and of ordinary good judgment, I dare say; but you will meet such men at every turn; and, with this susceptibility to imaginary prerogatives of standard, your life will be but a long gauntlet of doubtful appreciation.”

“Pardon me!” interrupted Paul, “I have seen but one Mr. Ashly, and I begin to doubt whether I ever shall see

another. Whatever the caprice which has invested him, a stranger, with this inexplicable touchstone, he is the only man in Europe, as yet, by whose presence I feel it applied to me. And of course it is not his own higher rank. You know, yourself, how sufficiently friendly is my footing with those who, in title and fortune, are his superiors. But it is an instinct with which I cannot reason, which I can neither evade nor modify, that the impression which *he* first and frankly receives of my quality—my stamp from Nature—will be incontrovertible. And yet, I say again, that, with intense curiosity to know what this will be—desire, therefore, to approach and be conversant with him—I have no presentiment of liking Mr. Ashly. On the contrary, thus far, he has aroused my antagonism only; and, the question between us once settled, I shall be likelier to be his enemy than his friend.”

“But I should suppose,” said Tetherly, evidently somewhat puzzled, “that you would need some antagonism, rivalry, or trial of comparative strength, with him, to settle this question, or is it merely what is his estimate of you, and not how you rank in reference to himself?”

“Why, what effect it might have on faith in the touchstone, to find myself in any respect the superior of the man who is the holder of it, I do not know. Possibly it might assist me in the struggle of becoming indifferent to his valuation, to find that I could write better, paint

better, fence or fight better, or even be more successful as a lover; but the question is not one of talent, you should understand. It is not what my grade is, either for intellectual ability or acquirement. Nor would it be at all affected by my having been born a duke or a peasant. It is simply what is the natural texture, coarser or finer, of my stuff and quality as a gentleman. The clay of mankind is of different grain, you will allow, my dear monarchist, and not altogether dependent for its fineness on birth and breeding!"

"A tangled theme, my dear republican, and one for which, even if I were inclined to discuss it at all, we have no time, if you have an engagement in the country to breakfast. Shall I see you to-morrow morning?" asked Tetherly, rising from the table and giving his two fingers to his friend, with his usual affectation of indifference, as he turned away.

In another half-hour Paul was on his way to the Casa G——, and, as his *vetturino* took a more thoughtful pace, commencing the ascent from the bank of the Arno into the hills, his mood and the glorious completeness and contentment of the forenoon seemed scarce in harmony. There was a gay birth-day celebration before him, and a hearty welcome to it; but the reaction of a trying and eventful week was on his spirits—a week which had been passed in the care for what society

would call his "honor," but the memory of which, he found, was not to be given over like a carelessly-turned leaf to the past. The refusal of the English baronet to be put courteously right, had driven Paul to seek vindication by the detestable extremity of the duel, and, with Tetherly's counsel and service, the hard-wrung reparation had been ample enough—but the conscience to which he had been educated was not at ease with his pride. With this new unrest in his bosom—secret and without sympathy, too, for the events of the just foregone week of his absence from Florence were probably unsuspected by the gay spirits with whom he was presently to mingle—he would have been happier with a day of solitude, or in the company of his pencil.

But when was ever unhappiness not the shortest way to be more loved by woman? To the subdued manner and the languid eye which Paul brought to the festivity, there was the instant response of a twofold tenderness of reception by its lovely queen. Prepared to find fault with him for his non-compliance with her written request, and his since unexplained long absence, the beautiful Sybil felt, at the very first sight of his saddened features, that her thought of reproach had been unjust to him. The lingering and kindly pressure of her hand, and the softened tone of her inquiries as she welcomed him back, expressed this to him with a charm for which his de-

pressed spirits had prepared the want and the welcome. Made lighter-hearted by it for the moment, he did not ask himself why the soft smile of that faultlessly moulded mouth seemed less in need of a certain expressional sweetness than ever before!

The latest of the guests were meantime arriving, though, among these, was not Mr. Ashly. Paul had noticed that this gentleman, arrived before him, stood leaning leisurely against the porch of the *casa*, watching every movement of the lovely Sybil, and scarce attending at all to Mrs. Paleford, who talked to him from her easy-chair near by. It did not require an artistic quickness of perception to see that there was a movement in the watchful grey eye which indicated an inquiry into the meaning of the *attaché's* very cordial welcome. Paul felt that he was more scrutinized than he would otherwise have been, and was so far pleased that he was sure, now, of commanding at least the attention of Mr. Ashly. That Sybil might have awakened a tender interest in the new visitor (who now first saw her since her childhood), was a natural possibility, which, strange to say, had not before occurred to Paul, and he saw in it the sudden prospect of a level upon which he and Mr. Ashly would more fairly meet.

"I think you said you knew Mr. Fane," said Mrs. Paleford to her half-abstracted neighbor, as Paul paid his respects to her, after leaving Sybil.

Both gentlemen bowed a recognition, and Paul endeavored, as before, to measure the indifference of his address by the stranger's; though he could but perceive that, with no relaxation of distant coldness, there was, still, a certain non-withdrawal of the look that met his own—differing, thereby, from the reluctant half glance at their previous introduction—which he took to be proof of the effect of his friend Tetherly's errand. The unjust prepossession was removed.

With the serving of the breakfast, the queen of the festivity, in her white dress, became a busy mover among the guests. It was part of the style of little cost, which Colonel Paleford was so quietly and consistently resolute in maintaining, in accordance with his little means, that there should be no servants in waiting at their simple entertainments. The dishes once placed upon the table, he and his daughter did what serving the guests could not do for themselves—a very enlivening novelty in its operation, for it distributed their presence as well as the fruits and coffee, giving a pic-nic unceremoniousness to scenes, which, with the difference of rank and languages, might else have been constrained and unequal.

And there was a triumph of economy over cost, too, in the splendor of the apartment for these rural gaieties. By the colonel's influence with his landlord vintager, in early spring, the rude trellising and latticing for the vines had

been extended over an earthen level on the southern exposure of the house, and shaped into a roomy hall, with columns and alcoves. The apartments of the old stone casa were small and low; but the pavilion in which now sat the English ambassador and his family, and a few of the most intelligent of the nobles and beauties of the court of Florence, was as spacious as luxury could make it, and it would scarce have been more beautiful if it had been built of emeralds. With the prodigal fulness of the leaves, in their June ripeness, the light came through the tangled roof in the brightest of green and gold, and no stuffs of the upholsterer could have exceeded the drapery of the side columns, with their fruit-laden branches and tendrils. Nature, that looks well enough with any company, looked certainly more in harmony than usual with the refinement and elegance it was here shutting in.

But as the breakfast gaieties went on, Paul found himself again balancing one of those embarrassing choices of conduct, in the light shadings of which, visible only to himself, rather than in any tangible trial or adventure, seemed to lie the shaping of his destiny. To his quick eyes it became soon evident that the white dress moving so actively about, carried with it the completely absorbed interest and attention of Mr. Ashly. As Sybil stopped and seated herself with one group after another, conversing everywhere with the same childlike abandonment to the

joyousness of the hour, he dwelt upon her with his gaze of abstracted and forgetful earnestness, even showing by the nervous movement of his lip that he was continually on the verge of being surprised into a passionate exclamation at her beauty. It was very apparent that, in the exceeding loveliness of the daughter of his exile friend, the cold and reserved man had found a wholly unanticipated enchantment.

On easy terms of acquaintance with most of the company present, Paul was of course at liberty to bestow his time and attention in more than one way, acceptably. He needed not to see, unless he pleased, that there was a continual opportunity to be the aid and attendant of the active Sybil—sharing her services gaily when occasion required, and meantime excusably lingering near her and breathing the spell of her charming presence. With the familiar *abandon* of the whole tone of the party, he might thus monopolize a great portion of her real attention without remark, while, just as unobservedly (by all but herself), he might find any one of several other ladies sufficiently attractive.

But it became clear enough to Paul, at the same time, as the morning wore on, that just the portion which he might thus relinquish of the smiles and near society of the fair Sybil, would fall to the lot of Mr. Ashly. By several little commissions from Colonel and Mrs. Paleford, the lat-

ter gentleman had been made the occasional sharer of her duties; and, from nearness of age and similarity of language, it was to these two that the more particular attendance upon her was by general consent given over. The service which the one should fail to render, would be performed by the other—the call to her side for which one might not be on the watch, would seem as if for the other alone intended.

Paul could not but understand that Mr. Ashly was what the world would consider a very desirable “match,” and (where that point was any way brought in question) a man to be given way to. He himself, as a confessed “detri-mental,” would be especially called upon to recognize and even promote such legitimate precedence—by the neglecting and avoiding Miss Sybil, that is to say, or otherwise creating opportunity, to forward the better-freighted bliss of the richer lover, if need were. But such magnanimity, just now, on Paul’s part, was not to be altogether spontaneous. He did not feel sufficiently kindly, or even sufficiently indifferent, to Mr. Ashly, to yield the path without summons—before he should be seen, indeed, to stand at all in the way. In fact, his pride and other unwillingnesses sought a refuge from the present exercise of the virtue; and he found it in the apparent coldness of the lady herself to his rival, and the nature of what he believed to be his own friendship with her—a Platonic intimacy, he now

insisted, which might be still enjoyed without any interference with the claims of a proper suitor for her hand.

[But there was an episode to this breakfast, for which we see that we shall require the elbow-room of another chapter.]



CHAPTER XVII.

To the reader who is keeping in view the key to our story—that it portrays only the vanishing and usually overlooked shades of the coloring of a destiny (the “parts of a life yet untold”)—it will not seem strange that we dwell thus principally on what was but a hidden and unconfessed thought of Paul’s mind during this birth-day breakfast. With most of the company the day was one (intellectually) of slippers and shirt-sleeves, loosened girdles, and unbound hair. Such, at least, would have been the apparelling of their thoughts made visible. The rural festivity so uncostly and so simple, was a mental (as well as bodily) taking of breath in fresh open air, after confinement to things artificial—a change from the imprisonment of palace luxury and ceremony to the cottage freedom of plain surroundings and gaiety at will. And the guests were not only such as could best realize this charm of contrast, but they were those who could be at ease with

each other, under full abandonment to its simplicities for the day. Colonel Paleford, with a dignity above all splendor, and his daughter with a beauty above all rank, were the best of bidders to such a feast. But, while Paul felt all this with the others, and was busy laying away in his memory its many artistic contrasts and combinations, the haunting spectre-thought in the background of his mind was still visible. Trifling as it might have been, to all present, and improbable as the existence of such a thought would have seemed to her who believed herself (for him, at least), the sole magnet of the hour, it still had its perpetual place, and acted, with more or less influence, upon his every look and movement.

A proposition to change the scene, by a transfer of the coffee-tray to the cool spring in the grove below the hill, was the break-up of the party at the table; and, through the long alleys of the vineyard, and away under the old chestnuts and cedars of the small wood that had been left to shelter the spring, were seen scattered the careless promenaders. The movement, of course, involved some new arrangements, for which the fair Sybil must call upon her aids; and Paul saw immediately, that, in the joint attendance which would thus fall upon him and Mr. Ashly, there would be a familiar contact with that gentleman, which would throw light enough for his own quick eyes upon his secret point of curiosity.

In another moment entered the little barefooted *regazza* and her peasant mother (of the resident family of the vineyard, the outside attendants upon the festivity), bringing between them the costly tray with its silver furniture, which was almost the only relic preserved from the reduced fortune of the Palefords. To remove this heavy article with its fragrant load, and set it on the old stone curb of the well below, was evidently to be the work of two courteous assistants—the lady herself, and her father with his one arm, already laden with cake-baskets and cups.

“Mr. Fane! Mr. Ashly!” was the appealing call upon them, by the sweet voice of the smiling Sybil.

Paul stepped promptly forward, and, with a slight inclination of the head, to express his consent to the proposed partnership, laid his hand upon the tray.

But there was a hesitation—a single instant of embarrassment—a look of inquiry to Colonel Paleford, as if the partnership should rather have been with him—before the movement was acceded to by Mr. Ashly. With a single glance at Paul (but no word of courtesy or other sign of willing fellowship with him in the lady’s service) he then hurriedly recovered as if from a delay that had grown awkward, lifted his part of the burthen and walked on.

Now, while there was nothing in this at which Paul could reasonably take offence—no proffer of his own rejected, no advance of his own repelled—there was still

enough in that look of an instant, and the trifling action that accompanied it, to decide, incontrovertibly, for him, the visionary uncertainty at his heart. The phantom question was answered. Circumstances had combined to present him fairly and fully to the fatal eye in which lay the power of pronouncing what was his grade in nature; and by the unprompted instinct of that eye, he had been looked down upon as inferior. The disparagement of his quality by the same tribunal once before—the sister's cold eye, in which resided the same power—was thus confirmed. Even as they walked, now, side by side—through the vibrations of the senseless burthen borne between his and Mr. Ashly's united grasp—there passed, it seemed to him, a magnetism of rejection and depreciation. He was denied to be of the world's finer clay. The moss-covered stones of the old well were not reached, before the gates of his heart closed upon the admitted secret, so long held at arms'-length, and like a barbed arrow, it was shut in to rankle in his pride.

But with the setting down of the massive silver tray, there was a new liveliness given, all at once, to the ministrations of the lovely Egeria. An ingenious table was suddenly constructed by a lattice-gate taken from its hinges and laid across the well-curb; the turned-up bucket was placed for a seat; the coffee-cups and their various accompaniments were skillfully arranged; and every want of the

extemporized entertainment seemed to be magically anticipated. As the guests came in, couple after couple, from their stroll through the vineyard and grove, they were waited on and served from the fragrant fount, with the graceful gaiety of a play; the groups were arranged picturesquely on the green-sward in the shade, and the pervading tone of buoyancy and merry unceremoniousness made the scene less like a party from modern Florence than like a romance from Boccacio.

And it would have been difficult for Mr. Ashly not to see that the conjuror of this fresh spell of gaiety was Mr. Fane. In the change of this gentleman's manner to sudden joyousness, there had been a complete magnetism for the spirits of the company. In the confident aptness of his attendance upon Miss Paleford, his ready tact of courtesy, his respectful but eager promptness, his abandonment altogether to the mirth and impulse of the moment, it was evident that he was exercising a natural gift of becoming the ruling spirit of the hour. Whatever might be Mr. Ashly's opinion as to its assumption or forwardness, it was undeniably successful in superseding and throwing into the shade his own dignity and reserve; and he could not but see, also, that it sat exceedingly well upon Mr. Fane.

But, for Sybil, there was a magnetism, in this change of Paul's manner, which reached farther. Exhilarated as she

might easily have been with such magic anticipation of her wants, such skillful service, and such aid of herself as a centre to shine and diffuse brightness to her circle of guests, there was a contrast in it all, which was alone visible to her, and which stirred a thoughtfulness deeper than any exhilaration was likely to have thrown its light. She had but vaguely realized, before, what was wanting in Paul's manner to her. With all the charm she had secretly thought to possess over him, there was a reserved depth in his heart, which his manner, hitherto, in some inexplicable way, assured her she did not reach. Without fairly reasoning upon it—dismissing it, indeed, with some easily found excuse as often as it presented itself—she had been, still, perseveringly haunted by this uncertainty of her power over him.

It was changed now! There was an entireness of purpose in every look, word, and action—a welcome to that and more—which was new in Paul's manner. Its expression seemed to her to be that of a lover, and a complete and daring one—one who wished all her attention for the moment, and was confident of deserving and winning it—yet with a lover's deference in the accent of the words addressed only to his own ear, and a lover's deep-toned earnestness and an inexpressibly softened tenderness, in the attentions which were for herself only. It was the making her seem the whole world to him, as she had longed to

seen; and the response—in her gentle yieldingness of movement and tone, and in the more languid softness which now veiled the usual clearness of her eye—would have startled any observer less pre-occupied than he who had caused it.

But, in thus playing the lover for the first time to this beautiful girl, Paul was madly unaware both of the character of his motive, and of the extent to which he was successful. His apparent coolness and self-possession might have made him seem more than usually conscious of what responsibility he was incurring; yet these were but the outer workings of an inner tumult that, in its present first waking, was wholly ungovernable. The power of concentration that was his leading quality of mind—enabling him now, as it did, to bend every faculty with almost unnatural aptitude and quickness to the accomplishment of his object—was, for the present, but a withdrawal of all light from conscience and motive. The slight which his visionary sensibility had received from Mr. Ashly forced the long-gathered darkness of the cloud in his mind to a lightning point. He had been pronounced of coarser clay—and by any possible assertion of a superiority of his own he must lessen the contempt of that verdict! With his stung and turbulent feeling he did not stop to ask himself why this doom (a doom to which he had so strangely and unresistingly assented) should be revenged upon the one who had

unconsciously pronounced it ; nor did he realize, as he certainly would have done, with time for reflection, how the retaliatory exercise of a momentary mastery over his censor—staking all, to win, for an hour of resentful rivalry, the preference of the young heart aspired to by the other—was, in its possible injury to the best hopes of that young heart, at least, wanton and unworthy.

It approached the sunset, and most of the titled and gay guests had taken their leave. The few who remained were the more special intimates of the family ; and for these had been reserved a summons to the little drawing-room of the old Casa, where, over a cup of tea, were to be produced and discussed the more affectionate secrets of the occasion—the letters of felicitation, the flowers, the birthday presents, and the exchange of smiles and sweet wishes between parents and child.

The latter part of the entertainment out of doors had been a most marked carrying out of the morning's vindictive triumph. Colonel Paleford himself had watched with mingled feelings the more thoughtful and assured contentment of his daughter's manner, and her complete absorption in Paul's every look and word. The bewilderment of Mr. Ashly with her beauty, and the rejection of his lover-

like attentions, which was contained in her polite civility to him, were, to the clear-sighted eyes of the father, equally apparent. It was not for him to disturb, even by a look, on her birth-day, this dream of happiness; yet he could not but sigh over the advantages she was thus girlishly throwing aside—worldly advantages that might be so important to beauty and qualities like hers; and, in his manner to the depressed and discouraged lover, there was a tenderness of courtesy which indirectly soothed his annoyance, and which, rightly interpreted, would have been to him a whisper of encouragement.

But, to the exhilarating liveliness with which Paul—still in untiring spirits—was successfully giving the tone to the conversation at the tea-table, there was presently an interruption. The servant handed in a box, which had just been left at the gate for Miss Paleford—a birth-day present, doubtless arriving late—and the colonel proceeded to gratify general curiosity by opening it in the drawing-room.

Paul alone was in the secret of what that box contained. It was a copy of Sybil's portrait, taken from the study of the group of three, drawn from memory, on which he had spent such careful elaboration. Simply framed as a crayon sketch, it had only "best wishes for many happy returns of the day" written under the address, and no intimation from whence it came, or who was the painter. On this

latter point he knew very well there would be room for ample conjecture; as the Palefords, with their love of the Arts, were constant visitors to the various studios of Florence, and the colonel was a kind encourager particularly of his own countrymen among the artists. That the features of one so generally admired should have been taken for a study, was of course very natural, and, though a portrait without a sitting, it was a compliment to her beauty very likely to be paid.

As the picture was taken out, and set in a favorable light against the wall, there was a universal recognition of the subject; but it was looked at, for a moment or two, with silent and wondering inquisitiveness. Wholly unsuspected to be the artist, even by Sybil herself, Paul's conversation—(between the awkwardness of giving an opinion of his own work, and the necessity of still playing a leading part while listening for the criticisms and watching for the first impressions he so wished to store away in his memory)—became a matter of some embarrassment.

"It is very quiet," said Colonel Paleford, at last, whose habit of mind was to feel his way to a decision very carefully—"nothing startling about it."

Paul mentally thanked him for that much. It was a negative approval of one of his chief aims in the design.

"And what do you think of it, Mrs. Paleford?" asked

some one, as the invalid's chair was wheeled up to the point of view.

"Well," said the mother, gazing at it with moistened eyes very tenderly, "it looks as I have imagined Sybil might look when she is alone."

Paul thanked the mother in his heart for what, to him, was very sweet praise of his picture.

"It is a fine piece of work," said the English ambassador, who had scrutinized it very carefully through his glass—"a masterly drawing, I think, if only for what it has left undone. The temptations to effect were very great in so queenly a face, and the artist has kept true to a certain flower-like simplicity."

Standing a little apart from the company, meantime with Sybil left to his more especial attention, Paul was thoughtfully treasuring up the last very precious commendation of his drawing, when the fair original herself, somewhat overpowered with the discussion of her beauty, turned to him with a criticism for his ear alone.

"It seems to me," she said, "to lack decision, and to be altogether too dreamy for so real a person as I am. At least I do not feel very like *that*. What is your judgment of it?"

Paul made an evasive reply; but, in that chance remark was expressed the difficulty he had found in the picture—the want, indeed, which there was for him in the magnetism and character of Miss Paleford. It explained where

he had departed from the likeness, and why he had been compelled to make the expression rather what it might have been than what it was. But, though he treasured and remembered these few significant words of hers, his attention was awakened the next moment, by what was far more a surprise.

Colonel Paleford had watched Mr. Ashly with great interest after becoming aware of the little drama that had been enacting out of doors, and, keeping near him at the tea-table, he endeavored to soften with his own tact and kindness, as far as was possible, the neglect which the slighted lover was experiencing from his preoccupied daughter. The conversation he had addressed to him, from time to time, had but partially withdrawn him from his still persevering and unequal contest with Paul, however, till, on the appearance of the picture, he became in that entirely and abstractedly absorbed. With his arms crossed over the back of one of the high chairs, he stood quite motionless for a few minutes, looking at it with an intensity in which the living original seemed almost forgotten.

"And what do *you* think of the picture, my dear Ashly?" was the question from Colonel Paleford which had arrested Paul's ear, and made him a listener to the reply, so wholly unexpected.

"I should like very much to know the artist," he said,

with the slow enunciation of one thinking aloud. "That sketch is from a quality of genius that I have been trying for years to find."

"Why, I thought myself, that the touch was very delicate," said the Colonel, assenting and approaching the picture.

"Something of that, perhaps, too," continued Mr. Ashly "but I referred to the expression only. The artist has gone deeper than the face, for his sitter."

"Less a likeness than an ideal, then, you think?"

"No! I have not yet quite made myself understood," the still half-musing critic went on to say. "There are plenty of artists who idealize a portrait, but it is only their way of softening defects of feature, or oftener, perhaps, of slighting something difficult to draw. It is an easy mode of flattering the subject. But the departure from literal likeness in this sketch, seems to me only a more clear-sighted faithfulness to the original. I feel in looking at that, as if my own previous impression of the face were corrected by a deeper-seeing observer."

(Paul began to feel that what he had tried to believe of Miss Paleford's character of mind, and painted accordingly, was, to her more real lover, a full faith.)

"You find it to be an intellectually true portrait of Sybil?" said the father, looking inquiringly to and fro between his daughter and the picture.

"Pardon me!—one more distinction!" persisted Mr. Ashly. It is the due proportion given to the qualities of character, as well as to those of the mind, which makes its peculiarity. The artist has gone in and seen her whole nature, with spirit-perception. He has read her heart as well as recognised her thoughts. And it is not a picture of any one look or any special mood of mind. It is the unconscious repose of expression that she might have, as Mrs. Paleford just now said, "when she is alone"—a pure woman's mere calm of life when just risen from her morning prayer. Believe me, my dear colonel, that artist has what is called 'inspiration!' When at work at his art, at least, whoever he is, he is a noble-natured and superior man."

(Could Paul believe his ears? Was the utterer of these words the man from whom he thought he had received unpardonable contempt? And—second thought!—could he forgive himself for the revenge he had taken for what was now so evidently but a passing impression of himself, acted upon with no knowledge of his inner and better nature?)

"Of course you will soon know who was the artist?" said Mr. Ashly, looking at the colonel over his shoulder as he stepped forward to Mrs. Paleford to offer her his hand and take his leave.

"To-morrow, I dare say; and we will take you to him

at once, to see his other works—(though to tell the truth, I have not the remotest idea which of our artist friends it can be)—but why are you off, my dear Ashly?" said the hospitable host, retaining the hand of his guest.

The movement was a signal for dispersion, however, and Paul, with scarce self-command enough left under this new reaction, to make a farewell consistent at all with his doings for the day, said adieu under cover of the general stir, and took his way, with the thickening twilight, toward town. He needed solitude. He saw life getting tangled before him; and, to be at peace with himself again, there was much of what he had lately done that he must mourn over and undo.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUTUMN had been brought round by the pitilessly punctual wheel of the Seasons, and the trees probably felt—as Blivins chanced to feel with a corresponding Octoberness—that their attraction, for what they had most rejoiced in, was beginning to weaken. The leaves clung with less constancy to the trees, and Paul seemed to adhere with less and less flourishing perpetuity of vegetation to his faithful Bosh. From passing every day, and the whole day, at the Blivins studio, Paul was now but an occasional visitor there—his work at that neglected easel on the other side of the room, indeed, becoming daily more uncertain and brief. And it was like a departure of summer that Bosh felt this falling off. He would have expressed it clumsily in words, probably, but he had an affection for his college room-mate that had leaved out into a most umbrageous ever-pleasantness; and, oh, the wintriness of shedding such foliage of the soul!

If it had been only that Paul was growing idle, or had

more studying to do at the Galleries, or if, for any reason but the apparently real one, he was now bestowing less time and talk on his old chum and crony, the consolation might have been easier to find. But there was an inference which made it a slight, as well as a neglect. It was another friend—another artist—who was taking Bosh's place as an intimate. There was even another studio, where was set an easel at which the faithless fellow spent the day with his pencil. Those long and precious hours of gossip over work, the un-pumped flow of thoughts welling like a spring, were not only thirsty Bosh's, no more, but somebody else's!

Upon this new intimacy and its peculiar attraction, Paul was, somehow, curiously incommunicative. He not only would not introduce Blivins to his friend the sculptor, but, in their still daily conversations at their common lodgings, he could not be hinted into a discussion of his style of genius and works, nor into any description of his person and manners. That his name was "Signor Valerio," and that he was the favorite student of old Secchi the copyist, was all that the reluctant Paul seemed willing to communicate; and this to one from whom he never before had a secret!

Paul's intimacy with the Princess (Signor Valerio) had taken a new character from the moment of his confessing himself an artist. Her surprise to find him really one,

was the most agreeable that she had recognised, in the conversation of the *attaché*, the qualities of mind which had made her designate him, in playful compliment, "an artist;" and his constant society, as such, chanced to be just the companionship of which she most felt the want. The privacy with which both she and Paul were devoting life to the pursuit of art, while apparently interested only in the gaieties of a court, made a common bond of sympathy; and, with an inquiry into his working habits, it was very natural that she should propose to place an easel for him where she could share his artistic hours, in her own well-lighted and luxurious studio. That there was any reason why those hours of inspired industry—apparently thrown away on his countryman Blivins, as far as companionship went—should not be linked with her own daily life, in a retreat thus hidden from the world, was a doubt not likely to occur to the Princess, with her habitual defiance of appearances.

The complete union of the artist-life of the two, however, had been^a but gradually brought about. It was not till the coming on of the summer that the Palefords had taken their departure (the invalid mother of Sybil ordered by the physician to the Baths of Lucca); and this, with the return of Mr. Ashly to England, had left Paul, for the first time, at full leisure, and with interest and thought to spare, for the cultivation of a friendship. With time and sensi-

bilities to dispose of, the studio of the gifted and high-born woman became more and more agreeable as a resort, and there was no alarm in Paul's mind at the nature of the new intimacy thus commencing. Startling as it might have seemed, if its fullest mingling of thoughts and hours could have been looked forward to, the successive steps to it were natural and rational. The repose and imperturbableness of the Princess's habitual tone and presence may have contributed to this ; but it was, probably, more the elevated level of the leading topics of interest between them. Is there not a height of intellectual sympathy at which a friendship between those of opposite sex may be cultivated without danger from love ? Some indirect light is thrown, upon Paul's experience in the matter, by the following passage from one of his letters to his mother :—

* * * The path of Art which, in glowing and sanguine moments, I mark out for myself as peculiarly my own, becomes very indistinct under depression and discouragement. It is not merely that I cannot handle my pencil, when out of spirits, but the handling that I have already done, with a feeling of success and a belief in its originality, loses all force and beauty to my eye. If I were working entirely by myself, I should, half the time, neither be the same person, nor believe Art to be the same thing.

The fact is, dear mother (though it may look like a craving for flattery), we need some one to talk to us about ourselves. I, at least, need to be followed very closely by some loving and willing

appreciator, who believes in me when I am doubtful about myself, and, by praise and judicious criticism, re-identifies and restores the ideal I have lost. The love that would praise blindly and indiscriminately would not answer for this. While it needs the delicacy and watchful devotion of a woman, it needs, also, the well-balanced and unimpulsive judgment of a man.

"Signor Valerio," in whose studio I oftenest pass my day, at present, is just this friend to me. He is a sculptor, and works at his clay model, while, at my easel, near by, I paint or draw. For any good touch or line of mine, I get the immediate recognition which inspires me to surpass it; for any doubtful line, I get the discussion which confirms or rejects; for the concentration and patience without which there is no excellence (yet which are so fickle and evasive as moods of the mind), I get approval for what I show, and encouragement to show more. My genius (if I may use that word, for lack of a better) does not depend on the deferred or unheard approval of a distant public, but has its reward while the glow of performance is still warm, in the near and present congratulation so much sweeter than tardy fame.

And now, are you prepared for a surprise? And will you believe that this "Signor Valerio"—the sculptor in artist costume, and with the confident ease as well as the slouched hat of a gentleman—is a woman? With your ideas of such matters, my dear mother, this will seem, first incredible, then disreputable. But do not condemn too hastily. The Princess C—— (who thus disguises herself) is a woman with genius enough to be entitled to an eccentricity. I will give you her history, as known to the world, in another letter. She thus varies her court life, because, to a high rank in genius she was as much born as to that of a princess, and she must have privilege and scope as an artist. I formed her

acquaintance at the duke's palace, and have gradually been admitted to this intimacy of common pursuits. The sculpture, which is her utterance of inspiration, is a sort of *fraternity* of Art between us which makes her male attire seem natural.

Now, can you not see, dear mother, how this should be, to me, even more absorbing than a love would be—a friendship without passion, and better than a passion? Doubtless there is danger in such an intimacy; for the princess is very lovely as a woman, and her nature is glowing and fearless—but, escaping this, how precious is the gem which only with this peril is perfected! I really do not think a friend complete who has not the mental qualities of the two sexes; yet, as a man is thought less than man who is feminine enough for this, it must be a woman who is more than woman by being masculine enough. And the poetry of sacredness that slumbers in the background of such a friendship—with a tempting human passion within reach, for which the else completely united hearts are too strong and too pure!

Yes, mother! this slender and soft-eyed youth, who looks over my shoulder as I draw, is the romance of my present life, I am free to own. And that there are moments when the danger which belongs to the romance seems critical, I own as freely. Yet professional habit, and her own unconsciousness, make me forget, for the great portion of the time, that there is anything to be guarded against; and it is curious, after all, how much there is conventional and needless in our notions of what is modest. I leave my work to look, in turn, at some new beauty of her moulding; and, though the model is entirely nude—(an ideal of Hermione)—I stand before it with “Signor Valerio,” and, without a thought of indelicacy, criticise and admire all its graces and proportions. She has strangely given to this Hermione, indeed, wholly undraped

as it is, a look of high birth which throws a protecting atmosphere of purity around it. And in this look (which, I am un-republican enough to confess, is a very great fascination of her own) lies part of the secret, perhaps, why her fearless defiances of dress and conduct seem all so irreproachable. * * *

As our chapter was going on to say (before this letter's occurring to us as throwing some light on the character of Paul's new friendship), there was a sudden suspension of the neglect about which Blivins had grown disconsolate. For several mornings the deserter had appeared and gone duly to work, at his accustomed easel. No explanation, to be sure, of why he had wandered, nor why he now returned—but there he was, gentle and playful as ever, sketching and conversing as naturally as if no rival intimate and artist had ever made another studio more agreeable. Bosh was too delicate as well as too happy to ask questions. He behaved like a generous woman to her uncatechised truant of a lover; simply striving to be so much sweeter than ever that the forgiven sinner would never do so any more.

The pacified Bosh would not have liked to know, however, why that same Signor Valerio was under the necessity of dispensing with Paul's society for a while!

In the course of some conversation on the subject of models, the princess had spoken of the difficulty she

found in the coarseness of the forms of the Italian lower classes; and, with Paul's incidental mention of the slighter and more graceful American type of female beauty, Miss Firkin's defeated ambition (as to her portrait and its justice to her figure) had been naturally alluded to. A regret expressed by the princess that she had not been the artist—to obviate the embarrassment by being of the same sex as the sitter—led to a proposal that her highness should be introduced to the fair Sophia as simply a sculptress, and so make the bust which the Ohio beauty was ambitious of possessing; at the same time obtaining a study of her form for artistic uses. There was a novelty of adventure in the matter which at once took the princess's fancy.

Paul, since the discomfiture and departure of the fortune-hunting and dinner-seeking baronet, had become a great favorite with the Firkins. Yet it required some little diplomacy to arrange the sittings for the bust—mamma's prejudice on the subject to be encountered, point blank, and Blivins (the now accepted lover) to be kept altogether in the dark; besides which, it was necessary to soften the fact, to Mrs. Firkin at least, that the sculptress, for *incog.* reasons of her own, as well as for convenience, would be apparelled as a gentleman! These difficulties surmounted, however, the first interview was brought about; and Mrs. Firkin

(greatly astonished at what she saw, but still satisfied that "Signor Valerio" was really of the harmless gender, and no mistake), was content with once matronizing her daughter to that queer place, and willing, that, for the remaining number of sittings, she should go alone. It was on the days for these *tête-à-tête* sittings that Paul was of course excluded from the princess's studio, and returned, as we have already mentioned, to his friend Blivins; and as the only eye-witness to give us an account of what took place in his absence is the fair sitter herself, we will borrow what she is willing to tell of it from one of her confidential letters. She thus wrote to her friend and constant correspondent, Miss Kitty Kumletts, of Rumpusville, Alabama:

FLORENCE, —, —.

MY DEAR KITTY:

Please receive me in my night-cap and slippers, for I was all undressed to go to bed, when I found I must first go to Alabama—so full of thoughts of you, that is to say, that there would be no sleeping till I had written you a letter. It is not late, either. You are very certain to be wide awake, yourself. Very likely enjoying your second-hand sunset—the identical sun that set, for us here in Florence, three or four hours ago! Of course you love it more because it has lately seen *me*; though, when Mr. Fane happened to mention Europe's getting the first call from the sun and moon, Pa was quite disgusted with the whole affair. He said the Declaration of Independence ought to have arranged that our glorious

Republic should have the "first cut" of daylight and everything else.

But, talking of Mr. Fane and me, Kitty, what do you think of this charming man's having managed to gratify my little pet wickedness of a wish, after all? I may as well own, I suppose, that this letter is for nothing but to tell you that I am sitting for my bust! Pos-i-tive-ly! And, to an artist in trousers that button in front, and reach (I tremble to write it) to his very heels!

Have you got your breath, my dear, so that I can proceed to give you the particulars?

You know I wrote to you of the injustice done to my figure by a portrait in which I was boxed up as a goddess of Liberty, with nothing visible but a nose, as it were. My sorrows on this point touched the heart of Mr. Fane. He has an artist's eye, and had observed my "proportions," (such a nice, useful word, proportions!) and not wishing me to be the "full many a flower that's born to blush *unseen*," he set about contriving how I *should* be seen—in marble, which is not expected to blush, you know! I thought, at the first mention of the possibility of it, that mamma would scream so that you could hear her over there.

But (not to keep you longer in suspense) it appeared that Mr. Fane had a friend whose profession was sculpture, and who, when at work, was as like a naughty man as possible; but who had only to undress to be a lady! It was "*Mr. Valerio*," and in masculine belongings; but there was neither whisker nor moustache, and the trousers were altogether harmless. So Mr. Fane assured us on his honor—though mamma had seen boys with smooth faces, and would trust no apparent young man to be left alone with my "proportions," till she had first put her two good Ohio eyes upon him.

Well, we went, first, all together. We were shown into a beau-

tiful studio, and "Signor Valerio" came in, presently, dressed like an artist and with a slouched hat, and as like a man—but I will not aggravate your curiosity by saying how much. Mamma looked sharp, I assure you! She watched him as he walked round, and saw him sit down and get up; and heard him speak, and looked at his chin and under his hat—and, finally, she was content to go away, with Mr. Fane, and leave me alone with "Signor Valerio." What she saw that convinced her, I have no idea, for, to my eyes, it was exactly as any slender young man would begin by behaving and looking; but there I was—left unchaperoned with that suit of clothes and its contents—and nothing but Mr. Fane's "solemn honor" to satisfy *me* that it was a woman! And—to "sit" to him, presently! Oh, Kitty! oh!

Of course you know how they do these things. A clay model, partly shaped, stood on the stand, and "Signor Valerio," after a few minutes' chat, took the wet cloth from this muddy lump, and very coolly commenced working on the—on the "proportions." This was as much as to say, that, as it was to be a likeness of me, the lovely original was expected to be visible at the same place; and here commenced my crisis! I had gone there in a loose wrapper, on purpose—but, to take off my collar and let down my shoulder-straps, etc., with a pair of pantaloons walking about the room! Impossible! And then a man's hat with a pair of live eyes, that might be of any sex whatever, under the rim! Wait till you have shown your "proportions" under such awful circumstances, my dear!

No! I was compelled to a compromise. I tried—and tried—but no! I couldn't! It was not the trousers altogether—but *that hat!* As long as such a male unmistakability as a man's hat with eyes under it was looking right at me, I could never take off my

shoulder-straps—never! never! And, finally, I asked if the hat couldn't be put out of the room.

But, la! with the letting down of the "Signor's" long hair (for he politely complied with my request, though he wears the hat to shade his weak eyes from the light), he became female at once! With those black tresses down his back, the trousers had no manner of expression! I should not have minded, even if his suspenders had been visible. And, do you know, I think that it is long hair that makes the difference, after all? Why the men, who adore us so, don't let their own hair grow, and thus become just as adorable, themselves, I cannot conceive. I am wondering whether I mightn't do several convenient things with my curls let down—such as wearing trousers for a walk in muddy weather, or for riding so much more nicely on a man's saddle. Think that over, Kitty, and perhaps, when I come home, we can set the fashion!

Well, it's very pleasant to have one's figure admired, even by a woman. Once sure that the trousers were *non compos*, I "peeled" (as brother 'Phus calls it, when he strips for a fight), and let myself be studiously perused by "Signor Valerio" for a couple of hours; and his compliments to my little inequalities, and his efforts to make a likeness of what he found perfect, made a charming morning of it. I have been twice since, and even the clay model is not yet done. This is to be cast in plaster, you know, and then will come the finishing in marble—so that I have a long intimacy with these same innocuous masculinities in prospect.

Now, of all this, my over-particular Blivins knows nothing. He is to be pacified, when the bust is done, either by having it under lock and key to himself (to begin with—for, of course, I can have my own way about it, after awhile), or by having "Hebe" or "Venus" engraved upon the pedestal, so that people may be let

into his family secrets without knowing it. As to Mr. Fane's having seen it, the dear honest fellow loves him so much that he would not mind, I think, even if it had been the original!

I shall write to you of my remaining experiences in "sitting." I have a deal to learn myself, for I have not yet made out who or what this "Signor Valerio" is, or how she and Mr. Fane happen to be so very well acquainted. She seems pretty—but there's no knowing what a woman is like till you see her in petticoats. For these, and some other delightful matters, however, look to my future letters. To bed, now, dear Kitty, goes your

Ever affectionate

'PHIA FIRKIN.

And, with one of our hero's side-secrets thus confidentially explained, we shall resume his more direct personal experiences in another chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

OF another new thread that had been strangely braided into Paul's web of tangled life, during this month of October, we must unravel the windings a little.

With the almost immediate departure of the Palefords, for the Baths of Lucca, after the birthday breakfast, the mystery of the portrait had been left unsolved. It was not that Paul meant to maintain his *incognito* beyond the first surprise; but the apt occasion for confessing himself the painter had not come, amid the hurry and embarrassments of leave-taking; and as, among the friendly commissions given him to do in their absence, one was, to look around upon the walls of the various studios and find other works by which to identify this unknown pencil, a continuance of the mystification, built upon his imaginary adventures in search of it, became an amusing spice for his correspondence.

In reply to one of Paul's letters, in which he had hinted at coming upon some traces of the unknown, Colonel Pale-

ford had somewhat enlarged his commission. Mr. Ashly had written to inform his friends that a maiden aunt, with whom they were well acquainted, was on her way to Florence; and, supposing, that, of course, by this time, the painter of the admired sketch of Miss Sybil had been discovered, he wished a portrait of this beloved relative by the same hand. The Colonel's letter enclosed a note of introduction for the artist (the name left in blank) to Miss Winifred Ashly; and the new request to Paul was, that he would take some additional pains to find the said artist, deliver to him the instructions with the note, and inform him that the lady-subject for his pencil was already arrived and at the Hotel Europa.

Paul's first impulse was to confess to the authorship of the sketch of Sybil, and put an end to the mystification at once, by the return of Mr. Ashly's introductory note. But, with a second thought arose a question: Why not present the letter himself, and paint the picture? The opportunity to make some beginning of a reparation to one whom he felt he had greatly wronged—to complete and present to him (if only as a grateful acknowledgment for his appreciative praise) a portrait that would give him pleasure—was a motive that, even by itself, seemed quite sufficient. The ambition for a second approval, by the same discriminating judgment from which, in fact, he had won his first honors as an artist, of course, had its weight.

But he found, too, that his long-hidden disquietude was still at work. The lady to sit for the picture was an ASHLY—of the blood in which seemed to reside the recognition of quality, to which irresistible instinct made him subject—and the curiosity awoke to present himself anew to this strange touchstone; or if it should not be found to reside in her look, also, to familiarize himself, at least, with the family features and character, and so strengthen his power of analyzing what had been to him, and might still be, such a phantom of humiliation. With the certainty that the Palefords would still be absent for a month, and the field thus entirely to himself, the project to take advantage of this strangely presented opportunity seemed as feasible as it was irresistibly tempting.

The filling up of the blank in the note of introduction, the morning after the travesty was resolved upon, cost Paul a puzzled twirl or two of his finger. It was, at last, fairly written, however—Evenden—the association with his simplest and most honest of friends seeming to serve as the apology demanded by his conscience for the assumption of a fictitious name. And with a courage that, for several reasons, required the bracing of a strong will, “Mr. Evenden,” at an early calling hour, sent up his card and note of introduction to Miss Ashly.

The lady whom Paul was presently to see (we will make use of his momentary delay in the ante-room to inform the

reader) was the maiden aunt of the two of the name who have already taken part in our story—the only sister of Mr. Ashly, their father. She was, however, from the incidental possession, in her own right, of a great portion of what was nominally the estate, and the power of disposing of it at her pleasure, a much more important personage in the family than an elderly single lady is usually likely to be. Her qualities of character, too, were quite in keeping with her adventitious consequence; and, though endearing and affectionate in her more familiar intercourse with her relatives, she was generally thought by their acquaintances to be of disposition and manners unapproachably cold and imperious. Her habits were very independent, and sometimes looked capricious and unsocial—her present journey, unattended, to Italy, for instance, when any one of the circle at home would gladly have accompanied her. Her apparent mental necessity for isolation—showing itself not only by refusal of the thrall of matrimony, but by avoidance even of the briefer restraints of habitual companionship or intimacy—had, of course, its human penalty of loneliness; and from this she found refuge in music. It was the one passion that took the overflow of what would not be locked up in her soul.

With the announcement that Miss Ashly would receive him, Paul followed the servant, and was ushered into the presence of a tall lady in mourning—the light of the room

so subdued, however, that he could distinguish only the general outline of her features. Unable to decide, at first, therefore, whether he was sitting for his own picture as well as she for hers—whether or no it was the dreaded look of an Ashly that was now bent upon him—his anticipations of embarrassment naturally gave place to his habitual ease of manner. Her voice made him formal, however. It had the tardy and unemphasized utterance of thoughts followed reluctantly, never anticipated, and not always overtaken. Even in the phrasing of the ceremonious common-places of reception, there was this same evidence of an inner world more lived in—the manner for the outer world (of intercourse with others) having the cold air of the room uninhabited or re-entered but to receive strangers.

“And when and where am I to sit to you, Mr. Evenden?” she asked, after expressing very decidedly the unwillingness of her compliance with her nephew’s request.

“Now and here,” said Paul, who had anticipated her probable wishes for promptness in the matter; “a servant is below with my drawing-board and easel, and if you will allow me to ring your bell and order them up, we can commence at once. As it is to be but a crayon sketch, I thought I would not put you to the inconvenience of coming to my out-of-the-way studio.”

“Thanks, my dear sir!” she replied, with an accent of polite surprise, as she rang the bell on the way to her

dressing-room; "your directness pleases me as much as your charming thoughtfulness of my comfort. Both promise well for your picture. I must leave you a moment, for a little change in my toilette, and, meantime, perhaps, you will make your arrangements as to light, etc. I will be with you presently."

But with the re-appearance of that tall figure, in the full light with which the un-shuttered windows had flooded the room in her absence, Paul did not resume his previous readiness for his task. By his first clear look at her now undisguised features, the lamp of genius within him seemed suddenly extinguished! Yet she had even more beauty than he had supposed. Though past the prime of life, her un-emotional current of reserve and coldness had worn no channels on her face. It had the shape and complexion of comparative youthfulness. But the Ashly eye was there, with its indescribable superiority, cold, fastidious, disdainful; and, under its steady look, Paul felt his powers as an artist—the evasive ideality of conception and the subtle dexterity of hand—palsied as by a spell.

An hour passed—and another—and they were hours of failure and vain effort, as to his work. But they were not without their interest. She sat before him, and he had an artist's privilege to gaze upon her face and analyze it. It seemed to him as if it were the very face from which he had received the look that turned the whole current of his

life, so strong was the likeness. It was curious to study it now. He sketched and erased, making little or no progress, even in completing the outline; and pausing as long between the touches of his pencil as was possible without exciting her attention. To her inquiries from time to time as to his success, he pleaded artistic difficulties, changes of design in the *pose*, or of conception in the expression and character. But, though discouraged as to favorably portraying the face, and despairing, indeed, of ever completing a picture of it, he did not the less gloat over his unlimited privilege of studying it. He rejoiced, also, in his artist liberty of silence—for, in the chance which it afforded for the yielding of precedence in the selection of topics and expression of opinion, it aided that deference which is the first charm of conversation, and so made it likelier that he should be himself agreeable to Miss Ashly, and without the appearance of effort.

The sitting was concluded with an engagement for the same hour on the following day; and the history of that, as of the day following, was very much the same. Paul had none but mechanical powers to bring to his work—no inspiration and no caprices of thought or handling—but he had the dogged industry of an iron will, and as much skill of pencil as had become habitual; and, with these, there was necessarily a progress in the portrait. It approached a likeness; and Miss Ashly was apparently as

content with it as she had expected to be, praising it more than Paul knew it deserved—but another solution of his secret and visionary problem was meantime working out; and while he meant that this should be watched to its extremest development, the intention to finally abandon his picture, as a task he could not complete to his liking, grew stronger and stronger.

With the close of the third day's sitting, Paul turned from the steps of the hotel, for a solitary stroll in the Ducal Gardens. He had a thought of discontent with which he wished to be alone. The three long and favorable opportunities of which he had now fully availed himself—the interviews with Miss Ashly under circumstances best calculated to test fully the question at his heart—had confirmed his humiliation once more. As an artist, known to her only by his manners and his introduction, he had stood again before the tribunal of that cold grey eye; and, this time with complete impartiality of position. If odds there were, in the scale, they were in his favor. Yet, up to the closing of the door, on that day's long interview, he had never, for one minute, been acknowledged as an equal. There was kindness, but it was condescension—courtesy and even sociability, but with a graciousness stamping it unmistakably as favor to an inferior. With the best courtliness he could command, in his own manners, his best tact of address, and a watchfulness too nervously awake to be

mistaken as to the effect, he had tried his magnetism of presence. There was nothing to prevent its being felt and acknowledged, as the presence of a gentleman in her own rank in life. *And it had not been so acknowledged!*

The morning of the fourth sitting found Paul on his way to the Hotel Europa—but with no intention of resuming his work. His errand, now, was merely to gather up his materials and take a polite leave of Miss Ashly, with, perhaps, a passing explanation, if necessary, as to the artistic difficulties he had found, in obtaining a likeness, and consequent discouragement and abandonment of it. A long night of struggle had been enough. His mortification was already given over to the past; for, with the intensity of concentration which was his leading quality of mind, trouble was speedily plummeted, and, as he crossed the bridge of the Arno, he was thinking less of the spoiled picture and his bitter lesson, than of work in which he could complete his forgetfulness of it, and which he should hurry back to resume at his own easel.

Arriving at the hotel, and impatient of delay, he did not send up his name; but, presuming that he was expected, according to engagement, he passed on, at once, to the drawing-room; and a servant chancing to be coming out at the moment, the door was thrown open, and he entered, unannounced. An apology for intrusion was just coming to his lips (for Miss Ashly was at the piano, and the low

soft air which she was playing seemed to be so interrupted by the noise of the door closing behind him that he expected her momentarily to turn), when his movement was arrested by the sweetness of the melody. He stood for an instant—observing, at the same time, that the player was wholly unconscious of his entrance—but, as he listened to the music, willing to prolong his knowledge of what seemed to him unusual skill upon the instrument, another call was suddenly made upon his attention.

Miss Ashly's back was turned to him; but, by a slow lifting of her head, with a passionate swell of the music, the descending light of the half-shuttered window fell full upon her features, making them, for the first time, distinctly visible in the mirror beyond. Paul glanced incidentally at the upturned face—but his gaze suddenly became fixed! Was this the same face with which he had become familiar? Did that mirror reflect truly the face upon which he had spent weary days of study, and, with the deeper look into which (as he believed) he had but found confirmation of his dislike? The same lines of feature were there—the same color and setting of the large grey eyes—but, how wonderful the change! If it were an outer mask that had become miraculously transparent, revealing another and a strangely unimagined face beneath it, the surprise could scarcely have been greater. Miss Ashly's features—

hitherto so cold and so forbidding—yet, now, with an expression almost to fall down before and worship!

Paul took a step forward. Rapt in her reverie of music (and it seemed like an improvisation of thoughts dropping upon the keys)—the player was unaware of his approach. He listened to what seemed a complete, yet unconscious abandonment to utterance of feeling—an alternation between mournfulness and tenderness—but, to his wondering eye, the feeling was even more passionately expressed in the countenance on which he was gazing. Over the calm coldness of that dreaded eye was now spread the warm softness of a tear unforbidden. The still lips had an arch of intense sensibility and pathos, which seemed to him unutterably beautiful—the beauty of what was immortal shining through. Even the marble-like rigidity of the finely chiselled nostrils had given place to a tremulous expansion, like the first quickening of inspiration to eloquence.

Paul thought no more of abandoning his picture. To linger near, and study, and portray that face, and to know more of that reserved and cold woman's unsuspected depths of character, was his newly awaked and passionate desire. He saw, with prophetic consciousness of power, the portrait he could make—a portrait of inner and more true resemblance—and through which

he felt that he could breathe the whole fire of his genius. He only longed to paint her as she sat, at this moment, forgetfully before him ! But he should remember that look, and reproduce some faint shadowing of its angel sweetness, at least, in copying from her usual features with his fresh eyes. His heart beat quick, and his fingers felt dextrous and ready.

“ Will Miss Ashly pardon me ? ” he said, interrupting her as she came to a hesitating cadence in her playing.

And, in another instant, the lady was on her feet, and his sitter of yesterday, stately and ceremonious through all the embarrassment of her surprise, stepped forward to receive him. But Paul mentally closed his eyes to the Miss Ashly now preparing for her morning’s unwilling occupation ; and saying little as she took her accustomed place, hurried only to prepare his pencils, erase what he had previously drawn, and begin anew.

And of this newly inspired sitting, and its results, we can scarce tell all, without deferring the history to the chapter which is to follow.

CHAPTER XX.

PAUL's labor upon the portrait he had been ready to abandon, was by no means lost. His obstinate industry for three days had supplied the correctness and relative-ness of proportion without which the most inspired picture would be incomplete. He did not propose to change the position of the figure or the aspect of the head and features. The upturned face, which he had seen in the mirror, though it might have formed a beautiful conception for a St. Cecilia, would have seemed affected, to English eyes, as a literal portrait. But, at the same time that the outline, and the posture, and the features, were to be the same, it was a wholly different chronicle of a life which was now to be embodied in the expression—a wholly different character, of which the self-same lineaments were to be the presence and language.

And Paul's haunting phantom was forgotten as he pursued his task on this fourth morning. Yet he might well have remembered it, but for his knowledge of a look

deeper than the exterior features from which he drew. Miss Ashly had been interrupted at her impassioned music—called away from the happiness of a pleasanter world—for the business of this reluctant hour; and the cold grey eye, if he had stopped at its forbidding and outer threshold of expression, would have, more than before, seemed to shrink from his companionship. But, in the far-reaching enthusiasm with which he struggled to bring to light the once-seen beauty beyond, he forgot the pride that was nearer; and what that deeper nature's estimate of his own quality of clay might be, was a question left unasked, and unthought of, by his present glowing imagination.

But, of some difference in the manners, or at least, in the presence or magnetism of the artist himself, Miss Ashly, in her turn, began slowly to be aware. His gaze had no longer the scrutiny from which she shrank—his eye, somehow, was within the door which she had hitherto locked against its intrusion. The feeling of resistance to his long-continued and steadily-bent looks upon her features—a feeling of which she had been so unpleasantly conscious, that the repeated sittings for her portrait seemed greater and greater penances, which only her love for her nephew could make endurable—was entirely removed. It affected even her posture, as the hour went on. She turned more unconstrainedly to the light, and her features relaxed, at the same time, into the repose of complete self-

forgetfulness. With the first absolutely willing smile which he had seen upon her face since the sittings began, she spoke, as the clock on the mantelpiece struck for noon.

"Wooing a likeness, I suppose, Mr. Evenden," she said, "is like other wooing; the willingness grows upon one. You may continue your work, if you find yourself in the vein. I am not tired."

"Thanks to *both* the Misses Ashly," replied Paul, bowing ceremoniously as if to two persons; "though it is not often that the slighted lady gives way with so good a grace to her rival!"

His sitter seemed mystified, but waited silently, with a very confiding look of inquiry, for an explanation."

"I fear I shall scarce make you understand," continued Paul, "that I was mistakenly employed for three days upon the portrait of another Miss Ashly—one, at least, with a very different face, from this now upon my easel. It was only to-day that I chanced to see, for the first time, the countenance of her on whose portrait I am so much more likely to be successful. And, to my great satisfaction, I find, by the just-expressed willingness to prolong the sitting, that the more coy lady is content to have been discovered, and better pleased than the other to be the subject of a picture."

"And the plain prose of which is, I suppose, that you

have seen, to-day, an expression you had not seen before. I fear" (she continued, evidently feeling a little uneasy as she thought about it) "that the compliment of your thinking better of me upon acquaintance is outweighed by the inference as to my general look and manners."

Paul balanced, in his mind, for a moment, whether he was well acquainted enough, yet, with the lady, to make a frank avowal of his first impression—tempting as was the opportunity it might give for a question as to the Ashly look. But he deferred it.

"Why, I suppose," he said, evading the personality by a general remark, "that, to every character of any depth or variety, there is an inner as well as an outer nature—the character being none the less estimable because these are apparently very different. Probably it is an accident of education or circumstances, which of the two puts its stamp upon the features and manners."

"But still," she said, "there would surely be more dignity in an exterior that was a frank and full expression of the whole character."

"That would be true," said Paul, continuing to apologize to her for herself, "if the bad world we live in gave a frank and full response to this whole expression. But, of our gold, silver, and copper, the baser coin is sometimes the most current and acceptable; and, with finding that our more precious qualities are only wasted or undervalued,

we soon begin to hoard them away and show no sign of possessing them."

"Yet it seems a pity," she suggested, "that, in consequence of such concealment, two who are really congenial should meet without mutual recognition, or, even that a single person should go unappreciated through life, simply because the manners give no clue to the character."

"Why, chance (as we have found to-day) may reveal the secret," he argued, "even if to the quicker sense that could best appreciate it, there be no betrayal of the hidden nature, by sympathy or physiognomy. And what a luxury, after all, to have an inner character, for those who are intimate with us, of which the world knows nothing! How delightful to have even different looks and manners for the few by whom we are understood or the one to whom the heart is given!"

"And, when portrayed, it should certainly be by one who can get at that same inner likeness," she added, smiling on Paul very genially, "though, by the way, as I have not seen your work of this morning, I do not know whether my own inner countenance, as you are pleased to consider it, is preferable to the outer and usual one. We might easily differ, in our opinion of it, though I suppose you will scarce allow my judgment, even of my own face, to be more correct than yours, who have studied it so much."

“No,” said Paul, “for, curiously enough, we are better judges of any face than of our own. There are few things people are more mistaken about than the impression their faces make on others. Of the *fidelity* of the likeness you would be better able to decide, however; for there is a certain *feel*, independent of the eye, which infallibly recognises resemblance. When you look on your own portrait, you know whether you were ever conscious of what is there portrayed. But this does not decide the choice between the becomingness of different expressions which are equally true, nor between the comparative desirableness of the inner and outer countenances of which we were speaking. And it is this defective memory of our own looks (a man ‘straightway forgetting what manner of man he is,’ as the Bible says) which makes it so dependent on chance circumstances, as I said before, whether or not the story of an inner and better self is told in the features. We are unaware of the gradual formation of our habitual expression of face (none except very artful persons ever making it a study or materially controlling it, I fancy), and so, though involuntary, it is rather a chronicle of what influences we have been subjected to than of our true character. But,” added Paul, rising from his work and setting back his easel, “it is time to come to the ‘improvement’ of my long sermon. Let me introduce you to yourself! This unfinished sketch (and I shall require a sitting

or two more to complete it, I believe) will represent you—if not truly—at least as reflected in the mirror of my present eyes!”

Miss Ashly looked silently on the sketch, while Paul busied himself with laying away his materials for the day. It was by no means a literal likeness of the lady who now stood before it. Its wide departure from this common aim of a portrait, impressed her, at first view, unfavorably. But while she saw that it differed from her face as she knew it in the glass, there was still the likeness of which he had discoursed to her so artistically—the likeness of what she *felt* to be herself—and this grew upon her as she gazed. And it grew more and more wonderful to her how he should have seen what was there portrayed. While there was much that she would not have openly claimed, in that expression—so high its order of beauty—she could not but silently acknowledge it to be herself. It was the face of an imaginative, sensitive, pure, and proud woman—the pride so spiritualized and ennobled that it seemed like a grace—and she could not but see, also, that, with all its resemblance to what she felt true, as to ripeness of mind and maturity, it was still glowing as with a youthfulness of nature undiminished.

“I shall leave you alone with your other self,” said Paul, approaching to take his leave; “for I prefer not to hear your criticism on my sketch till you have compared

it with the original—an original which it will require solitude to see truly. 'To-morrow, at the same hour, then, shall I have the pleasure of finding you?'

She held out her hand to him with a smile instead of a reply, and, in the cordial pressure which he received from those delicate fingers, he found approval enough for his picture, without words. And with the glow of successful genius—of hard-won triumph over obstacles and embarrassments—Paul made his way, for the first time, content, from that place of trial, homewards, across the Arno.

It was in a long and earnest conversation, preparatory to the next sitting, that the incident of the mirror was told—explaining to Miss Ashly the mystery of Paul's sudden change of conception as to her character and expression of face; and, with some little entreaty on his part, music was now mingled in their morning's interview, as a renewal of his inspiration. It was indeed a renewal of it! In her secret devotion for years to the instrument now trembling beneath her touch, she had acquired a skill of which she was herself scarcely conscious—playing seldom, even for listeners of her own family, but habitually and constantly in her own apartments when alone—and it had become, now, by much her more fluent utterance, readier and more confident than her voice, and linked, as to promptness and expressiveness, with the very pulses of her brain.

She thought music! And her improvisations—or thinkings aloud upon the piano—were of the character of reverie, uncapricious, and of the unforced and natural melody which is within reach of full sympathy and enjoyment by the unscientific lover of music. To listen to her was spirit-intercourse. The exchange of feeling and thought seemed to be by that finer medium which angels have, better than language.

It will be understood that this unsealing of an inner sanctuary of thought-utterance, was more than a sacrifice of a whim of secrecy, for the better completion of a portrait. With the constitutional reserve of Miss Ashly, the possession of this secret accomplishment was an invisible wall by which she was shut in from the world—by its practice, in solitude only, as unapproachable as if encased in crystal—and the admission of a stranger to this hidden world was, from its very surprise and novelty, a full surrender of confidence. Within it, her heart had not another door! And, kept simple and unsuspecting, through all her womanhood, as her imprisoned susceptibilities had thus been, she was like a child let out of school, in her frank joyousness of expansion and sympathy.

With this, and the peculiarity of Paul's nature, which has been already explained (his disposition wholly to forget what impression he might himself make, when once interested to absorb the meaning or sweetness of another's

mind), it is not wonderful that friendship grew apace. The character of Miss Ashly seemed to him a beautiful study, of which he was making a record in her features. He gave his whole attention to an admiring analysis and appreciation; and, with the double charm, that, while she opened her heart without words, in her music, he expressed his admiration without words by his pencil. For a woman hitherto so cold and so proud, kept, by this very pride and coldness, unsophisticated and genuine, there was resistless fascination in such intercourse.

But these eight or ten days of constant and confiding intimacy had not passed without peril to Paul's *incognito*. It was very evident that Miss Ashly's curiosity, as to the history and circumstances of the young artist, increased with her friendship for him. Conversation without restraint, each day for hours, gave naturally many opportunities for allusions and leading remarks, and these, with the positive questions which good-breeding allowed from time to time, Paul parried, of course, as he best could, but with imminent risk of detection. "Mr. Evenden" was at last established in her mind, however, as an artist with no distinction beyond his pencil, and dependent wholly upon it for future support; and, last and not least, with no engagement to marry. And these were facts, which, with some of his beginnings in art, he could safely disclose—the mystification consisting more in what he concealed, and, in

the change of geography, when compelled to speak as a countryman of her own.

With the history of the few days after the finishing of the portrait, we will not detain the reader. Miss Ashly made arrangements for having it retouched, before she should take possession of it, on her return through Florence (for she modestly insisted that he had made it much too young for the portrait of an old maid, but Paul thought not), and, after some delaying and deferring, she took her departure for Rome. The following letter, which Paul received from her, a fortnight after, will (with what we have narrated) explain the share she had in what forms the cobweb thread of our story—the exorcising, through contact and more familiar knowledge, of the spell that had seemed so formidable to Paul's self-appreciation, and which had fortunately taken definite shape, at his first starting in life, as the phantom of the Ashly eye.

Thus ran the letter from Rome :—

TO PAUL EVENDEN, ESQ. :

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am the first to write, and for this very new forwardness in myself, my pride naturally looks about for excuses. The best I can find within reach is, that I am the idler of the two. You would have written first to me (I will believe, at least, till this letter has gone)! but for devotion to your pencils and easel. While you are at your studio, toiling after some elusive

shadow of beauty, I am alone in my room, weary of sight-seeing, and with a day upon my hands.

But it was not likely that, for a mere letter of gossip, I should make this unusual exception to my habits of reserve. I may as well confess, perhaps, at once, that I am seated at my writing-desk, just now, with a resolution (a very wavering one, as yet) to express something in which I am far more interested than in the passing of idle time. I do not know whether I shall find the courage to write it—and, at any rate, I may seem to you to come upon it rather abruptly—but it is, for me, the arrival at a point which I have reached by steps almost imperceptible, and which nothing but perpetual thought would have familiarized to the pride that still shrinks from it. Will you, please, imagine for me (what I should blunderingly explain, I fear) this wondrous transition of my nature to its opposite extreme?

You have yourself to thank for the delusion under which, perhaps, I am mistakenly troubling you at present. Without your portrait of me, and your sweet persuasion of its truth while painting it, I should have submitted, uncomplainingly, to Time's closing of the gates behind me—the beauty which is in that picture, with the youthfulness of heart of which it still tells the story, consigned, warm and living, to the tomb of the Past! For I am “an old maid,” Mr. Evenden! at the period of life when, thus labelled, we are to be set on the shelf, and stop seeing and feeling.

Yet, I must say that the glow of your pencil's portrayal of me is rather a confirmation than a surprise. I have never been conscious of diminished youth. I recognise no loss of freshness in my senses, no lessening of elasticity either in step or in spirits—certainly no waning of interest in what is externally beautiful or exciting—while to music and poetry I have a far more impassioned

susceptibility than in years gone by. To my only confessor (my piano) I have often poured forth the murmurs of a weary sense of accumulation at my heart—affection uncoined and uncounted, that could not be spent, and would not be wasted or forgotten. Why I have not loved or been loved, with this lamp of feeling burning at the altar, I know not. Possibly, because, of the two, who (you tell me) inhabit this temple, there has been seen but the proud and cold one, who for a while discouraged your pencil. Certain, it seems to me that you are the first, by whom, in my whole life hitherto, my inner self has been seen or understood.

And now, is it strange that I wish to belong to my first discoverer? You have already anticipated what I would say. There are objections. I have weighed them against my wishes and my hopes. I am older than you. But in advance though I certainly am, in years, I feel side by side with you in the youth of a heart unwasted and kept back. You are wedded to your ambition in art, but my fortune would enable you to pursue it even more devotedly—or more at your ease and pleasure. And I have weighed also the risk of being refused, against the possibility that I might lose you through only your ignorance of the feeling you had inspired. The result is this offer. I love you, and would be yours.

I wait for your answer.

Yours, only,

WINIFRED ASHLY.

CHAPTER XXI.

PAUL's embarrassment, on receiving the letter from the stately spinster with the offer of her hand, was almost enough to counterbalance the triumph it chanced to contain, over his vampire thought of an Ashly. He became conscious, now, for the first time, how exclusively he had followed his own whim in the whole matter—the subtle flattery of a happily idealized likeness having been thoughtlessly sustained by his equally flattering deference and conversation. He felt guilty. He would have made an individual sacrifice, and not a small one, to repair the wrong. But there were others interested, on both her side and his own, for whose sake he must decline the offer, while at the same time, he was not ready to reveal all the motives upon which he had acted.

The portrait stood against the wall, and Paul sat before it with his writing materials prepared for an answer to the letter—his heart fairly on trial before the calm and noble look which he had himself given to the features of Miss

Ashly—when, by the measured step on the stair, he recognized the approach of his friend Tetherly. Regretting, with his first thought, that his present trouble involved the secret of a lady, and so could not be submitted to the ever-ready counsel and sympathy of his friend, he closed his portfolio, and was sitting unemployed before the portrait when Tetherly entered.

“Found at your devotions, I am ready to testify,” he said, as he gave Paul his two fingers, and pointed with his stick at the drawing. “And well worthy of a man’s worship she seems to be,” he continued, after a moment, taking a better point of view, and becoming wholly absorbed in his gaze; “what name has botany for such bright flowers?”

“Then you think the face a good one?” asked Paul, without answering his question, but with his curiosity enlivened by praise so unqualified from one usually so fastidious.

“I like it better than any face I have seen for a long time,” said Tetherly; “though I should like to know whether one of the principal charms I find in it is due to the artist. Is there a woman in the world who looks so unbreathed upon by the existence of any other human being—so as if, in consciousness, at least, she has had a whole planet to herself.”

Paul felt that what he had most labored to copy with his pencil was thus put into language.

"I thought it the main characteristic of the expression"—

"And is it *your* work then?" interrupted his visitor, turning full upon him with a look of incredulous surprise; "rather too well for your character of an 'amateur artist,' my dear Fane!"

"One may turn out a humbug by the mere force of merit, then?" asked Paul, laughing heartily at the allusion to the quarrel out of which his friend had helped him; "but you have penetrated at once to the main-spring of the lady's character, my dear Tetherly! She has, more than most people, a world of her own. Or, to express it a little differently, she requires to be so far sought through the depths of her reserve and self-reliance, that the distance amounts to as much."

"Yet, she looks genial, even behind that reserve," pursued Tetherly; "Is this her habitual expression?"

"No," said Paul, "for I had nearly finished her portrait, as I thought, before I saw it at all. The face had even grown unpleasing to me. You know the family look, for she is an Ashly, and the nephew, who has the same stamp of countenance, made the same unfavorable first impression on yourself, if I remember."

And here Paul explained to his friend the circumstances which had brought Miss Ashly to him as a sitter, and gave him the details, for the first time, of the early passage in

his own history, which was the key to his interest in the Ashly physiognomy. The quiet Englishman listened very thoughtfully; but his attention was still very evidently absorbed by the picture before him; and he expressed, in more than one way during the remaining few minutes of his call, surprise at the possibility of the less favorable impression which the artist had received from a face so beautiful.

With the closing of the door upon him, Paul re-opened his portfolio to resume the interrupted task. But as he sat and turned over in his mind the match, he had the ungrateful necessity of declining, it suddenly flashed upon him that there was a singular suitableness—in age, taste, and character, and now by manifest predilection at first sight of her portrait—between Miss Ashly and his friend. The more he thought of it, the more they seemed made for each other. And, by an irresistible impulse (for which, with his aversion to meddling with other people's disposal of their hearts, he afterward could never very naturally account), he was inspired to attempt a transfer, to Tetherly, of what that letter was to refuse for himself. He thus wrote:—

DEAR MISS ASHLY:

Your letter to "Mr. Evenden" is herewith enclosed, and you will be surprised to hear that there is no such person. The artist

who painted your portrait assumed the name (for an object which shall be more fully explained to you hereafter), and it was in the course of maintaining his *incognito*, that he thoughtlessly admitted your supposition as to the freedom of his hand. He thus led you into an error for which he hopes so to apologize as to be forgiven. He is not at liberty, at present, to form any matrimonial engagement; but he hopes that you will still allow him to retain the double flattery which your letter contains—precious flattery both for the artist and the man—and to burn incense to friendship, on an altar which, under other circumstances, might have been sacred to love. The explanation of the reasons for the *incognito*, is only deferred till the *dénouement* of a little drama of which it is just now a part.

But, in the confidence with which you have inspired me as a reader of character (to speak once more in my own person), I am tempted to share with you the reading of another, which, like your own, offered to me a problem, at first. I cannot resist coupling the two, as mysteries of human nature chancing to be unravelled at the same place and time, though I was not indebted, in this instance as in yours, to the having a pencil in my hand, and features under study for a picture. Not being a professed artist, Florence has been to me the living gallery that it is to the traveller and student of society; and you will pardon me if I designate yourself and this other friend as two of its most priceless originals.

Mr. Tetherly (the gentleman whom, without his consent, I am proposing to introduce to you) might make your acquaintance in the ordinary way. He is a friend, already, of your nephew's, I know. But, with such chance introduction, you would each take a wholly erroneous impression of the other, and would part, of course, more strangers than before—the veiled countenance and

qualities, of each, being (if I am not mistaken) just that of which the other might be most appreciative. By recalling the difference between my own first sketch of yourself and the portrait which conveyed my subsequent conception of your features, you will believe that, even with the most open eyes, two human countenances may require an interpreter to exchange language understandingly.

Would it prepossess you at all in my friend's favor if I were to begin by saying that he has just the quality of your sex in which our own is so likely to be your inferior—a most sensitive and refined delicacy and modesty? It is the somewhat morbid action of this quality that produces the sleepless self-depreciation which is his main characteristic, and under which his beautiful nature is effectually masked. The dread that he will be credited with some excellence which he does not possess, or that he may heedlessly take advantage of some privilege to which he is not fairly entitled, amounts to a nervous disclaimer perpetually visible in his manners; and, to the superficial observer, this seems but a bluff antagonism, eccentric and unsocial. Give him but the opportunity to serve you, by a genial acting out of his better and more confident self, and he changes as effectually as did the portrait of Miss Ashly under my suddenly enlightened and wholly reinspired pencil.

Of Mr. Tetherly's more obvious qualities as a man, the devoted friendship of so eminent and discriminating a person as the English minister is warranty enough. His Excellency is not likely to have crowded his attention and preference with such flattering constancy and perseverance on an unworthy subject. It is only strange that one so admirably suited to make happy the most highly endowed and tender of female natures (really quite the most model man I know of for a husband) should be apparently fated to die single. It seems to me, indeed, one of those needless irrecognitions of

fitness which have only to be pointed out to be wondered at and remedied. Without taking him into our confidence, at all, may I not present him to you, on your return to Florence, and so let him submit unconsciously to one more trial of his horoscope? If I am at all a judge of character and suitableness, no two hearts were ever formed to beat more in harmony than this unappropriated bachelor's and your own.

The letter I enclose to you (addressed to an unfound "Mr. Evenden"), may be returned to your portfolio as if never truant from thence—though, with actual life rather than romance to guide us, I think we might even venture to treat it openly, as but an erased page of love. Previous passions are confessable, I think, as being but the schooling which has made us ready for better lessons; and, with the inexperienced, especially, a rash love is a likely and liberalizing prelude to a ripe and well-considered one. At present, it seems to me that it will only be necessary for you to look upon Mr. Tetherly to understand the natural progression by which he should take precedence of Mr. Evenden," though, as I said before, the existence of that gentleman and the letter addressed to him, may be secrets, if you please, for yourself only.

I retain your portrait, for a final sitting, on your return; and I shall take that opportunity, with your permission, to bring about what will seem, to Mr. Tetherly, a *chance* introduction to you. It will scarce be to him like the beginning of acquaintance, however, as he has fairly fallen in love with your picture, and what with our discussion of its expressed characteristics and his own thoughtful and enamored study of its expression and meaning, will look upon you by no means as a stranger. And so, having (last, but not least) confessed to what was the real prompting of the main burden of my letter, I will beg your pardon for its eccentric freedom, dear

Miss Ashly, and (reserving, for the present, the more prosaic histories of myself and my friend), remain

Yours most sincerely,

PAUL FANE.

[We are compelled, occasionally, to take our measure, for a chapter, rather by incident than by length of description, and we will beg the reader's pardon for entering upon the next phase of our story in another chapter.]



CHAPTER XXII.

It was during the week that intervened between the dispatch of the foregoing letter and the return of Miss Ashly to Florence; and Paul was using his privilege, for the morning, at the easel placed for him in the private studio of the Princess C. The hours waxed on, toward noon, and he was ostensibly busy with his pencil; but he had gone there with a burden on his thoughts which was not to be unladen through his Art, and to give utterance to which, as yet, he had not found the apt first word required by his sensitiveness.

With any mere embarrassment of distinctions in politeness, or question calling for more practised knowledge of

the world, Paul had a reference both kindly and reliable in his friend Tetherly; but he had received two letters, the previous evening, involving, between them, a point of feeling, such as only the heart of a woman could give counsel upon. And yet, now, while he thanked heaven for the friendship within reach—combining the wisdom and disinterestedness of a lofty nature with the exquisite tenderness of woman—the conversation made its way but gradually toward the subject nearest his heart.

“I see it is ‘*invita Minerva*,’ this morning,” said the sculptress, dropping her moulding-stick to her side, and stepping back to get a remoter look at the clay bust she was moulding; “your pencil shows a hand as unwilling as mine.”

“I wish the pencil were as successful as its rival,” replied Paul. “And I must ask leave,” he continued, turning from his drawing to come in front of the moulding-stand, “while the model is still nominally unfinished, to flatter my chum Blivins with an introduction to it. We might thus make doubly sure of what ought to be achieved by the expression only—his admiring consent to its existence. There never was a purer representation of woman.”

“Why, it could not be otherwise and be true to Nature’s imprint on the original,” said the princess; “she has fearlessness and playfulness, two of the most reliable signs of

innocence. A lover should not object to such a portrait. Her desire to be thus modelled is very far from an indelicacy. It is her pride in what she recognises in herself as beautiful—vanity, if you please, and somewhat underbred in its exhibition—but, with purity quite unalarmed, seeking admiration.”

“My friend Blivins has the more common standard of modesty, however, demanding great show of concealment and entrenchment.”

“A show that oftenest indicates pretence and conscious uncertainty—if gentlemen did but know it. Hypocrisy in all things talks loudest. Now what could be more unoffending to the eye of genuine purity than thus much of the form of this fearlessly innocent creature? The playful humor with which she frolicked, at her first sitting, corroborated, for me, this impression of her character. And I have tried to give pure and unconscious fearlessness to the countenance, as Nature has done. It would pass, I think, for an ideal of a most spotless American Hebe.”

“Yet we are about to show you a higher model of one,” said Paul, one of whose pent-up subjects was thus approached. “Another Hebe—the young girl who was my boyhood’s ideal of what was purest and loveliest—is to be here to-morrow.”

“Ah, indeed! And that is the happiness which so hin

ders industry, this morning, I suppose?" asked the princess, with a smile.

"It acts upon my pencil, I confess," was the reluctant reply, "but not altogether as a hindrance of happiness. Longing, as I certainly do, to see this playmate of my childhood, it will be under a restraint which I look forward to with great embarrassment."

"Another love?" inquired his friend, with a smile.

"Not exactly—though it will certainly bear the look, and perhaps have to be admitted and acted upon as one. It is a dilemma, to tell the truth, in which I am very much in need of your womanly advice."

The countenance of the princess assumed the look of truthful earnest which was so prompt to appear, at any call, keeping her eccentricities, as well as her rank and fashion, subject to the language of her genuine human heart; and Paul, with his confidence fully responsive to the large, calm eyes bent upon him, proceeded to tell his story.

The more recent news from the Palefords had given less favorable reports of the condition of their invalid. With the close of the season, and the usual dispersion of the company at the Baths, she had not been considered strong enough to return to their home near Florence, and it was now understood that she was failing fast, and that they were but awaiting, at Lucca,

the fatality daily expected. With so melancholy an event for exchange of sympathy, the correspondence had both saddened and lessened, and Paul was looking for one of the colonel's brief and friendly missives from the sick-room, when, to his great surprise, he received, from the invalid herself, a letter, evidently written at intervals, and forwarded at last without the knowledge of those around her. It was scarce legible, from the weakness with which the pen had been held, but Paul had conned well its broken periods, and he read thus to his thoughtful listener :

MY DEAR MR. FANE :

Without dating my letter precisely from Spirit-land, I may almost claim a hearing from thence—so nearly arrived thither that I begin to see with the unworldly eyes of that better existence, and finding something to look back and say, which you will first read probably, when I am already there. It will be written with the trembling hand of departure, and at broken moments, stolen from the watchfulness of the dear one of whom I wish to speak ; but I trust to find strength and opportunity, as I go on, and to trace, with this last use of pen and ink, words which your kindly eyes may manage to decipher. If I mistake not, there will be an intuition at your heart that will even anticipate my meaning ; and, pray believe that, if it be possible to return to earth through the records of thoughts that go with us to heaven, these ill-traced words will speak to you also with a spirit-presence.

In hereby bequeathing to you what influence I may have toward

entrusting you with the happiness of my child (the object of my letter), I do but and my blessing, perhaps, to what would otherwise just as certainly be yours. The evidence that she loves you has been such as you could not be blind to; and—with her reserved pride, and the truth of a woman's instinct—I cannot suppose her belief, in the feeling she thus confidently reciprocates, to be an error. You love my dear Sybil, do you not?

But there are cobwebs across your path, which, by scruples of romance or delicacy, may be magnified into barriers impassable. The first of these, you will be surprised to hear, is her father's more worldly ambition for her. Fond as he is of you, personally (loving you, I believe, with a friendship that would make a sacrifice of anything, merely his own, to serve you), he is distrustful of the prospect for happiness with your confessedly very limited means. He thinks Sybil is of the type requiring rather the elegancies of profusion—freedom, at least, from all care. He fears your both waking, soon and sad, from a dream it were wiser to prevent.

With the memories of my own life of trying reverses, I am, of course, fully aware of what spells, without wealth, are left unwoven. They are many, it is true; and I could well wish, for you and Sybil, that there were independence of means, on one side or the other. But there are elements of happiness far more important to a sensitive and refined nature, for the securing of which, if need be, the risk of poverty may wisely be run. Even if I had not been always a better judge of this, as a woman, I could now claim a truer view, as seen with the disillusionizing retrospect from Death's door.

Oh, how many are the hours for which wealth has no beguiling! How often might a word, or a look, send a light into the heart

which could come from no blaze of jewels—enter by no lofty window! Pardon me, but there are so few of your sex, particularly of the wealthy and powerful, who have, for woman, the ingrained deference, the never-lessening honor, which form her atmosphere for happiness! It is rare, because it is something which can hardly be learned. It must be instinctive, a finer fibre of character born of poetry and tenderness, but strengthened and polished by the trials and studies which make a man chivalric and intellectual. Woman herself does not give the key to it. In the compliance and natural impressibility of her gentler nature, she allows it to be forgotten how pure she would rather be—how more delicate and more sensitive may be the heart whose want is left obediently unasserted.

I am not sure, my dear Mr. Fane, that, in the fitness which I see in you, as the match which my heart requires for that faultless child, I have not given great weight to your genius. The difference which this would make in a lover's appreciation of her, was shown in your inspired portrait—the picture of what she is like, to your eyes—representing her as the angel that she seems to her mother. This touches a tender spot, for me! With the thought of giving over, to any human being, the uncontrolled and irreversible possession of one so unspeakably precious, one so unbreathed upon in her purity and loveliness, there comes a dread which is almost like a fear of desecration, and which exacts hallowed reverence in the one who is to be trusted with her. From a lofty-hearted mother of your own, you have taken, I know, a blessed estimate of woman. And, with this, and the idealizing elevation of genius, you have (what I already said was the rarest quality in men) the deference and honor for our sex, in which the timid breath of happiness is drawn trustfully and freely.

Between yourself and Sybil, I know, there has been, as yet, no open avowal of love. In the scruple as to your means of support for a wife (which I feel safe in believing to be the only reason for your hesitation), there is a barrier which might become insurmountable without the encouragement which I here give. I think you may safely put it aside. With the feeling that Sybil now has for you, her happiness, I am very certain, would be best assured by sharing your lot—half of the right fate, with any trials, being better than the half of the wrong one, with wealth and splendor. I am sure that she thinks so. I write it here, that you may have the record of her mother's thought and wish, to outweigh the more worldly hesitancy of her father—his over-fond caution, and your over-generous delicacy likely to combine, I fear, in what would be but a mistaken tenderness of prudence.

“Have I said enough, dear Mr. Fane? Will what I have said give you my priceless daughter, with a mother's blessing? I write with my eyes full of their last tears—my heart full of what will go with me, please God, to a better world! Farewell! keep my child company on her way to join me, and let me meet you hereafter, as two who were made one for Heaven, by having passed their lives in this world blessedly together! Keep her pure! Be as pure! And may God bless you, united! While this trembling hand can write it,

Yours affectionately,

GERTRUDE PALEFORD.

The princess drew her hat more over her eyes, as Paul laid the letter on his knee, but there was a gleam of light upon their moist surface, which flashed out of the shadow.

“A singular and beautiful bequest,” she said, “to which there should be but a prompt acceptance, if all be as she thought.”

“Which I fear it is not,” said Paul, “though, upon the possibility (if it were for Miss Paleford’s happiness), I should be ready, of course, to stake all that is involved merely of my own. Before I say more upon this point, however, let me read an extract from the letter, received at the same time, announcing the coming of my friends from America.”

And Paul opened his mother’s letter, and read from the two concluding pages as follows :—

Mrs. Cleverly will remain for some time in Florence; and, for you to have Mary Evenden there, in the midst of objects and associations of such common interest to you both, will, of course, be delightful. The Arts—always a sufficient feast to share even at home—will be like an intoxication of sympathy where their charms are perfected by the world’s masterpieces. But, my dear Paul, a thought here takes shape, which has been to me, for some time, “a shadow on the wall.” More or less haunted by it for years, and dismissing it constantly as a subject that would be more manageable by-and-by, I must express it now as a new anxiety—though very possibly, in your mind it is a familiar matter, long ago recognized and disposed of. The more needless my nervousness shall thus prove to have been, however, the better pleased I shall be.

It is not the same Mary you left, who comes to you, now, in Florence. Has it occurred to you, that *the child*, who has been

all her life like a sister, with nothing to change the feeling while the first dream was uninterrupted, is to meet you again, after a long and endearing absence, *as a woman*? From some changes that I see, I doubt whether she will even look the same to you. She is fuller; and with the maturing of her form, her eyes and manner have a different expression.

I have thought, always, that there was a peculiarity rather remarkable in Mary's sentiment towards you. All through your boyhood, and till you left us for Europe, she had an interest in you, which (as you must have known), absorbed every faculty of her nature; but while this, by its *quantity* of affection, should be love, it was, in its *quality* wholly, intellectual. She had an idolatry for what she thought to be your genius; and, though not without a child's caressingness and affectionateness, I looked in vain for any sign of preference, as manifested commonly in personal admiration, jealousy of attention to others, watchfulness of looks, etc., etc. Your secret devotion to Art was, to her, the life and presence of your second and inner nature; and if this could have been found separately embodied from what others knew as my son Paul, I think your mere outward person would have been easily estranged from her thoughts.

But now, how are you to meet? That which Mary loved in you is, more than before, your outward identity—you are, much more completely and admirably, Paul the artist. The time of her absence from you has been passed in the studious heightening of the taste by which she appreciates your genius; she will be as much readier than before to give her whole soul to Paul the artist, as he is worthier than before to be so absorbingly worshipped. Then, even if she were not the strangely single-hearted creature that she is—(capable, I truly believe, of but one devotion in a life-

time)—the atmosphere in which you meet is, in itself, an inevitable renewal of the sympathy which united you. Florence is the Eden of Art, in which you will both feel it to be the happiness of the blest to be permitted to walk together.

And is the newly-awakened *woman* to take no part in this? Already yours by taste, intellect, and habit of childhood, is she at all unlikely to find a new feeling at her heart for the matured man that you are, and love you with her outward and more common nature, tenderly, passionately, and overwhelmingly? This is an important question for me, my dear son! Mary was entrusted to us with a confidence which makes my “watch and ward” over her, even more responsible than a mother’s. In the prosperity and happiness of such a love as this would be for her, I should feel every sympathy of my heart, as well as every pulse of my sense of duty fully interested. The bare possibility that one so precious might love unhappily a son of mine, is, as I said before, at present, my fearful “shadow on the wall.”

But, perhaps, my imagination—here, in my solitude, without you—is conjuring up needless phantoms of improbability. You have been away so long, and have been subjected to so many new and dazzling influences, that I naturally feel uncertain of my knowledge of you. If, as I most fervently hope and pray, you still feel the boy’s devotion to this most lovely and gifted of friends and playmates, and are prepared to fulfil, to the heart of the woman, the promise that was planted and nurtured so long and uninterruptedly in the fancy of the child, my anxieties are happily needless. At least, my dear boy, I have thus possessed you of my thought upon the subject. Do not meet Mary till you have fairly asked yourself the question, as to the venture it will be.

* * * * *

Paul closed the letter from his mother, and placed it, with the one he had previously read, in the hand of the princess—the two strangely co-incident appeals to his decision, upon which he so needed counsel—but the conversation was not readily resumed.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE *tête-à-tête* reverie (for both were perplexed with thoughts which struggled in vain for precedence in words) was interrupted, at last, by the princess's rising, with a smile, and returning to the model on which she had been at work.

"It shows how limited is Art, after all," she said "that we cannot express, in marble or on canvas, the two-person identity, which gives so much trouble in love. How would any likeness of you, for instance, resemble both Mr. Fane the *attaché* and my friend Paul the artist—two very separate gentlemen, who have inspired, it appears, very different passions in two wholly unlike and separate ladies! I venture to say (though both the *attaché* and the artist inhabit the one body), you look wholly different to the eyes of the two."

"Yet," said Paul, with a still very abstracted air, "I have not willingly concealed, either the man of society or the artist—though it would appear that I am but one of these at a time. Your highness still leaves me in my dilemma, however. By which of the two letters I have now read to you, does my honor most bind me to be guided?"

"Why, to tell the truth," she replied, after a moment of hesitation, "if the claims of both are not fairly equal, they are both, at least, so strong, that a preference of either must seem an injustice to the other. Mrs. Paleford would seem to have written without consulting her daughter—but she assumes that there is a mutually understood passion between you and Sybil, and that the girl's happiness depends on marrying you."

"Possibly a very incorrect opinion on the part of Mrs. Paleford," said Paul (contending, as he spoke, with his self-reproving memory of the birthday breakfast), "for, though chance circumstances may have given me a temporary favor in the young lady's eyes, her ideal of me (as you just now said) is but a partial and imperfect one. I am not the complete and mere man of society that she then took me to be. Would her happiness be best consulted by a marriage (even if she should prove to wish it), with one she but half understands?"

"Why, in finding you to be *more* than she first loved

you for being," said the princess, with a mischievous look of gravity, "I question the probability of a disappointment. Very few marriages have surprises on *that* side."

"But may she not think the artist rather a subtraction from the man of the world than an addition to his merits? She looks upon Art, at present, as a mere amateur accomplishment of mine—like a taste for autographs or minerals. It may be a surprise the other way, to find that the outer and more courtly world, to which she had supposed me to belong altogether, must lessen gradually in interest—the inner and artist world, for which she has no sympathy, assuming proportionately greater importance."

"Are you sure that she has no taste for Art, then?" asked his friend.

"The good taste of a refined education, undoubtedly," proceeded Paul, with the monotone of one thinking aloud; "she could scarce be her mother's daughter without that. But—as your highness well knows—there must be more than mere taste, to produce the sympathy which is demanded from love by an intellectual inner nature. The artist, to be happy, must be more loved for his genius than his person. The productions of his pencil must be more endearing than his manners or social accomplishments. And what would be more melancholy for herself,

than to find the progress of life to be only the widening of a chasm of dissimilarity—her husband requiring, more and more, that love on the altar of genius which she has no fire of sympathy to kindle!”

“Yet is not her present preference for you an instinctive appreciation of your whole nature?” inquired the princess, evidently interested for the heart under discussion.

“That Miss Sybil entertains for me partly the fancy or natural liking upon which girls oftenest marry,” said Paul, “I think very probable. But her preference is partly also the expression of an antagonism. Her imaginary horror chances to be what is commonly called a ‘mercenary match,’ and, with my avowed poverty, her girlish romance is, of course, enlisted, as her love would be disinterested. But poverty is not an attraction that would wear bright with time and using.”

“Nor would the contrary,” said the princess significantly.

“But the contrary, at least, gives the means of trying other resources for happiness,” insisted Paul. “Except to very impassioned natures, a romantic love is scarce a necessity; and wealth has many a compensation for the heart that has failed of its youthful ideal. And I am by no means sure that my rival, Mr. Ashly, might not develop so as to become even the romantic ideal of Miss Sybil’s maturer fancy.”

"What--is there a wealthy lover in waiting for her?" inquired the princess, to whom this part of the argument was new.

Paul gave the history of the rivalry at the birthday breakfast (narrated in a previous chapter), but without confessing fully to the motive which had prompted his own successful playing of the lover.

"Pardon me," said his friend (as he concluded with the account of Mr. Ashly's appreciation of the portrait), "pardon me, my dear Mr. Fane, but you seem to me, now, to have incurred a responsibility I had not before seen. With so intentional a winning for yourself of the young lady's preference, especially as it amounted to the shutting off of another lover, you are bound not to disappoint that preference, should it remain constant to you."

"But suppose the displaced lover could be reinstated?" replied Paul, somewhat perplexed, but giving voice to his secret hope of repairing his wrong to Mr. Ashly.

"Ah! there you express what offers a loophole of escape for you," assented his reproving listener; "though young ladies' hearts are not very transferable commodities, especially by the holders themselves. I will not ask how you propose to reinstate Mr. Ashly, for that, at least, must be a very delicate management of your secrets as a lover; but (if you will excuse a woman's curiosity) I should like

to get some clear idea of the greater certainty of happiness which you are promising yourself from this better love in the background."

Paul smiled, and balanced his pencil upon his finger for a moment or two of silence.

"I have had," he said at last, "what most lovers have not—a fair trial of my promised happiness. Mary Even-den was brought up with me as a sister, and has shown, by years of constancy, her appreciation of the inner nature for which I desire to be loved."

"And were you sure, always, of the secret spring of her sympathy with you? Might it not have been an instinctive natural affection, to which you yourself gave the name you wished it to bear? How sure are you that it was wholly intellectual?" questioned the princess.

Paul pressed his hand upon his eyes, and forced back all his memory upon the days in his hidden studio at home.

"It may be an abstraction of a somewhat visionary boyhood," he thoughtfully went on to say, "but, to me the most dream-craved sweetness of love, as well as its coldly measured best dignity and elevation, consists in its being inspired by the qualities of the mind only. Perhaps there is a refinement of vanity in not being willing to be admired for what any one else can do as well. I certainly could never feel a value for interest I had awakened merely by my manners or flatteries, or by the mere animal magnetism

of youth and unexplained sympathies. And, in Mary Evenden's difference, in this respect, from all others who were partial or kind to me—the difference which was the secret of her enduring fascination—I could not have been mistaken, I think.”

“Yet lovers are but poor anatomists of their own happiness,” still objected the princess.

“It was the reasonableness of my happiness which made part of its charm,” Paul pursued his confession by insisting. “There was no intoxication of the fancy—no effervescence of feeling, the sparkle of which was lost in calmer hours. It was gentle and well-considered attention, given to that which was noblest and purest in my nature. Every thought was recognized as it fell from the lips, every expression as it breathed through the features, every gleam of inspired work as it guided the pencil. And oh! who can describe the luxury of this intimate companionship of appreciation? Who (since, as your highness asserted just now, there may be two persons in one) can weigh, for an instant, the love for the mortal against that for the immortal—the love for grace and personal agreeableness that lessen and disappear as life gets on, against that for talent and intellectual acquirement, which, on the contrary, while life lasts, continue to ripen and grow more admirable?”

“A beautiful picture,” said the princess, with a smile,

"and, I have no doubt, faithfully descriptive of the intimacy you so tenderly remember. But pray do not forget that the 'mortal' is slighted while the 'immortal' is thus exclusively attended to, and that Nature does not long permit such partialities without a murmur. Intimate as you were, it is my impression that there is a Miss Evenden and a Mr. Fane who are yet to make each other's acquaintance. The chrysalis which you have both passed through, since your separation, will present each a stranger to the other—two strangers who may, very possibly, not be content with the old love which is not altogether suited to their new tastes."

Paul shook his head incredulously, while he smiled at the princess's scepticism of what, to him, was like a religion.

"You must excuse me," she continued (moulding indolently upon her model as she gave vent to her speculations on the problem he had submitted to her), "but I think your coming renewal of intimacy, with your old playmate, a little critical. I am not certain that you would become lovers again, even if your proposed disentanglement from Miss Paleford had left you quite free to look forward to it. Commencing again, from habit, with the exchange of merely intellectual sympathies, there would be, on both sides, insufficiency and disappointment. You are, both of you, of the higher class of natures which require love in

all its completeness—demanding fullness of acknowledgment of all qualities, personal and intellectual, and entireness of appreciation and admiration.”

“Love not often found,” said Paul, musingly, as he strove to lay aside his own theory and adopt, for the sake of frank argument, that of his companion.

“No!—you would scarce more than complete such an ideal lady-love by a pouring of both these young hearts—Sybil’s and Mary’s—into one. I suppose, in fact” (continued the still busy sculptress, with an arch look from under her hat), “that the two might love on—each having the monopoly of all she admires in you, without interference with the other.”

“Ah, pray do not make me out a flirt and *vaurien*, even in theory!” interrupted Paul, deprecatingly.

“Your alarm is needless,” said the princess, “for my theory was both carelessly and incorrectly stated. It need not be ‘love’ by which you should thus accept the sympathy and reciprocity of two natures. Or, if you accept love from the one heart, it would show very little self-control or elevation of nature if there could not be friendship—at least unexceptionably pure—with the other. Remember I am reasoning in the dark as to your own particular position, not having seen Mary Evenden, and not knowing whether she is in herself one of these rare completenesses—responsive to all that requires sympathy, either in the

intellect or the man; but, in most instances that have come to my knowledge, such has not been the happy destiny of genius. Its two-fold nature has not often found, in one heart and mind, all its needs of recognition and reply."

"You make genius out to be naturally the most unhappy of lovers," said Paul, beginning to be amused with the generalizing that had digressed from his own more special troubles.

"Perhaps so," continued the fair disputant, after a moment's pause; "and I am inclined to think that genius could (better than other natures, and certainly better for itself), do without what is called 'love,' altogether. The main portions of the sympathy it needs might be found in intimacies which could correctly and irreproachably be called 'friendships;' and its motives and conduct are oftenest misunderstood, because it requires, from these friendships, a tenderness of mental sympathy which seems, to common observers, possible only with love. I do not think the most intimate friends of men of genius need to be of the opposite sex. It is only because women's minds are more delicate and impressible, that it commonly is so. But, by either wholly ignoring love (or classing it among the instincts that are kept subdued and out of sight) while the sympathies of the mind are declared to be of no sex, but to have full and free liberty to choose and act without

reproach, the intellectual world would breathe its more native and proper element."

"Of which higher philosophy you, yourself, my dear princess," said Paul, with a low inclination of his head, "are a charming proof and illustration. Yet I wish, out of your beautiful speculations, I could draw some definite advice as to my best course of conduct to-morrow. Shall I leave Florence without awaiting the coming of Mary Evenden (in obedience to the warning which my mother's letter intended to give me), not seeing her while my honor is involved to give preference to another—or would there be more rudeness than tenderness of consideration in so manifest an avoidance, and, should I stay, therefore, and trust to the chances of open extrication from my dilemma?"

"Very fairly stated," said the princess; "and I will take the responsibility of giving a definite answer. Stay in Florence! See Mary Evenden to-morrow! But, understand me, I am not speaking thus venturesomely without some hope of assisting you. With your leave, I will *myself become your rival*, not as a lover, but (according to my theory just laid down) as a *friend*. To leave her alone with you, a stranger in Florence, with only your attendance and society, would make, whatever risk there is, more imminent, to say the least. But you say she is an artist, as well as ourselves. Bring her to my studio, and let me make a sister-artist's appeal to her ready sympathies! I

can thus occupy somewhat—perhaps engross, almost wholly—her attention and enthusiasm. If I interest her, as I thus hope to do, you will be left to yourself for a while, and the opportunity which you wish is secured to you, is it not?”

There was generous and kindly considerateness, as well as wisdom, in this thought of the princess’s; and Paul took his leave, after gratefully accepting both the advice and its proffered aid. And to this eventful morrow he looked forward, for the remainder of the day, with thoughts of far less sadness and perplexity than before.



CHAPTER XXIV.

It was not for several days, after the interview described in the last chapter, that Paul received, from one of the hotels upon the Arno, the expected message, announcing the arrival of his friends. The death of Mrs. Paleford had meantime occurred, as anticipated; and, with the proffer of aid and sympathy which his intimacy with the family called upon him to make—his reception of them on their return with the body to Florence, and his almost filial share in the melancholy arrangements and

last offices to the dead—the delay and its leisure had been timely, and the interval had been sufficiently engrossed with thought and feeling. He had followed the lost mother to the grave with an emotion which the two chief mourners (ignorant of the dying bequest that was now so heavy on his heart) could but little understand.

Like the parting of a dark cloud, however, was the sudden gleam of light into his mind with the news that Mary Evenden had come; and it was not difficult for one of his elastic temperament to throw all sad thoughts behind him as he hurried rapidly to the hotel where he was to see, once more, the face that had been dearest to him through years of romantic boyhood. It was not in Florence that he walked, as he made his way eagerly through the crowd. A memory of home glowed like a halo around him, shutting out all that was not filled with the presence of his mother's voice and smile.

On arriving at the hotel, Paul impatiently followed the waiter by whom he sent up his name, and a glimpse through the opening door showing him the well-known features of Mrs. Cleverly, he entered at the same moment that he was announced. A rush forward, and a kiss of respectful tenderness upon the held-out hand of the dear and kind matron, and he turned hurriedly to take Mary like a sister to his arms—but the movement was suddenly

paralysed, and, with an instant's hesitation, a bow of ceremony took the place of the intended caress! There were *two* ladies beside his old friend at the breakfast-table—one of them Mary, but the other the Miss Ashly of his long-cherished dread—the cold-eyed English girl who had first given the alarm to his boyish pride of nature!

“You remember Miss Ashly, whom you met at my house?” said Mrs. Cleverly, thinking it necessary to re-introduce Paul, as she saw his hesitation.

He relinquished the warm pressure of Mary's hand which he now held in his own, and very formally renewed his salutation to the politely undisturbed lady. With the icy bar which her presence had so abruptly put upon his overflowing heart, conversation, even with Mary, was now stiffened to the formalities of courtesy.

Mrs. Cleverly, during her short stay in London (it was afterwards explained to Paul) had fallen in with her old friends the Ashlys, and, with the pleasant accounts which they had been lately receiving from Florence, Miss Mildred expressed a desire to put herself under the convoy of the American party and join her aunt in Italy—a proposition, of course, very readily acceded to. In their letters written on the way, this addition to their company had not been mentioned, however; and thus, accidentally and without warning, Mary had brought with her the very

barrier which mysteriously divided her from Paul at his departure for Europe!

Paul, when his first greetings were over, made a fourth at the table; but, in spite of the glow of affectionate welcome at his heart, longing for expression, he was conscious of an irresistible influence upon his manners. He was the polished and indifferent *attaché*, even in questioning and listening to Mary Evenden alone. There was a presence at the table which no one else felt or understood, and to which he had been mysteriously subject, before, and was now subject, again.

Miss Ashly had very quietly confessed to not remembering having met Mr. Fane; and to her, for the first half hour, he was evidently but a stranger—an American gentleman with whom she had no topic in common—though one to whom she was bound to be civil, from his intimacy with her friends. She sat, half-absently, pushing the crumbs about in her plate, with a fork held daintily in her taper fingers, and giving but limited attention to the exchange of home news and personal inquiry going on around her. At one of the rotations of politeness, however, by which it became due to the third lady that some remark should be addressed to her also, Paul alluded to the Palefords, and their bereavement.

“Ah, you know the Palefords?” she said, with her fork

held still, for a moment, while she opened those large grey eyes upon the stranger.

The mention of the mourning scenes in which he had taken part led to other matters in connection with the subject, and it soon became evident to Miss Ashly that Mr. Fane had a very minute intimacy of knowledge as to her old friends and their circumstances. Paul could not but notice, however, as he made some reference to the celebration of the birth-day, that his listener's eagerness to hear something of her brother's share in that festivity became very keen, and that her interest in Sybil was of an affectionate tenderness which betrayed, to his sharpened perception, a sympathy in the secret of a love. He was very sure, from an incidental remark or two, that young Ashly had taken his sister into his confidence, and it was encouraging to the hopes of Paul for the brother's success, that there had evidently been no mention to her of himself, the rival of that day. With the account of the entertainments at the English embassy, and the many particulars relative to Colonel Paleford, and to her brother's gaieties in Florence, it grew clearer every moment that the points of mutual interest between Miss Mildred and Mr. Fane were more numerous than was at first anticipated; and the conversation at the breakfast-table, at last, was entirely given over to these two, so much the least acquainted.

"Oh, then, you know my Aunt Winnie?" exclaimed Miss Ashly, once more with pleased surprise, as some reference was made to the Palefords' expectation of seeing her, now that they were once more at Casa G——.

There was a little gratification of a love of mischief in the grave quietness with which Paul showed his confidential knowledge of Miss Winifred—her plans of travel, her manner of passing her time, her recent impressions of Italy, her newest likings and dislikings, health, spirits, and other matters upon which her habitually reserved letters left her relatives rather annoyingly in the dark. That this American friend of Mrs. Cleverly's knew her aunt more intimately than any gentleman of their acquaintance at home, and that she had talked familiarly to him of herself, in a way quite unprecedented for her usual habits as known to her family, became gradually more apparent to the astonished niece. The climax was reached, however, by the reply to a question as to her probable arrival in Florence.

"By her last letter to me," said Paul, "I am to expect her a week from to-day; and, by the way, I was to engage for her the very apartments into which the landlord has chanced to put you. She occupied them when here before."

Miss Ashly sat silent for a moment or two, manifestly

embarrassed how to suit her manner to one who was so much less a stranger than she had thought him.

"Pardon me, Mr. Fane!" she said, at last, turning to him with a smile and very frank opening of her large calm eyes; "you seem to know everything—will you allow me to ask you one more question? My brother, when here, saw a portrait of Miss Paleford with which he was very much delighted—so delighted, in fact, that he wants pictures of us all by the same hand. My aunt, I believe, has already sat to him, and I have half promised, if I like hers, to sit to him myself. Do you know this artist?"

Paul did not feel quite ready to give up the more agreeable indefiniteness of his position as a chance acquaintance of Miss Ashly's. To confess himself the artist would give him a new part to play, and one for which he felt that he required a little preparation.

"I know him very well," he said, rising from the table, after an instant's hesitation, "and I am quite sure, now I think of it, that he would like, as soon as possible, to have your opinion of that still unfinished portrait of your aunt. His studio is near by, and, if you will allow me, I will send over and get it."

Paul rang for a servant, and, writing a line to Blivins upon a card, dispatched him for the crayon—perseveringly addressing his conversation to his American friends, during

the man's absence, so as not to be embarrassed with further questions as to the unknown painter.

The messenger reappeared in a few minutes.

"You will excuse me," said Paul, closing all except one shutter, "if, as an amateur artist myself, I do my friend the justice to arrange the windows artistically. The drawing was made in this room, and we can give it its original light, which is a great advantage."

"What, were you present, then, at my aunt's sittings?" exclaimed, with still another surprise, the puzzled English girl.

"Yes; and I chanced to be consulted as to the *pose* of the head," Paul added, quietly, "so I can arrange it for you with great precision!"

And, setting a chair on the spot where, a few days before, had stood his easel, he placed the crayon in the exact light in which it had been drawn.

Miss Ashly looked at it, steadily and in silence. It was Paul's policy, of course, to show no more than a third person's natural desire for the expression of her opinion, but it was with difficulty he could now conceal his eagerness of curiosity.

"It is a very graceful drawing," said Mary, giving it, evidently, very slight attention.

"Quite a lady-like person," said Mrs. Cleverly.

Paul did not immediately remember that the picture

was to impress mainly by the character of its resemblance to the original, and that his friends, having never seen Miss Winifred Ashly, could be judges only of its mechanical execution. He felt, somehow, a resentment at what seemed to him the inappreciative coldness of Mary's remark.

"I am sorry my father is not here to see this," commenced Miss Ashly, at last, in a kind of soliloquy, as she leaned over the back of a chair, gazing at the picture; "the ideal of our family physiognomy is so admirably expressed!"

"But what do you think of it as a likeness?" Paul asked, merely to cover, by an indifferent question, his eagerness to hear her talk more upon the subject.

"Why, it is my aunt, certainly!" she replied, hesitatingly; "but," she continued, presently, with a smile, "it is more as I should expect her to look, in Heaven, hereafter, than as she seems to common eyes in our present world."

"So flattered, do you think?" said Paul.

"Not at all *untruly* flattered," proceeded Miss Ashly, seeing, evidently, with very much her brother's eyes, and hitting, by this discriminating remark, the very edge of Paul's demand for appreciation of his picture; "nothing is added to the original elements of the expression. It is truthfully, her face—wonderfully so—but, with an inspired

subtlety of art, heightened and spiritualized. I have seen my aunt look as this does, when a fine passage of poetry had been read to her, or when listening to the voluntary in church, or even when improvising upon the piano, by herself; but it is a rare look, and one a stranger is not at all likely to see. How this charming artist ever detected it, is one marvel to me, and it is a still greater marvel how he had the skill to arrest and embody anything so momentary and evanescent."

That such delicious praise could be uttered by the lips he saw before him, was to Paul a surprise for which he could scarce credit his senses! The indifference—almost the scorn—of her whom he had felt to be the coldest and proudest of her sex, changed to the very elixir of flattering appreciation! He looked at Miss Ashly. The calm, grey eye, which had seemed so icy and distant, was now fixed softly and admiringly on his work—the very arch of pride in that mouth so haughtily immovable was unbent to an expression of susceptibility and sweetness.

"I have seen your brother's face when it had somewhat of the same character," said Paul, so bewildered that he scarce knew what he uttered.

Miss Ashly stepped into her room, and returned in a moment with a miniature.

"This," she said, opening and handing it to Paul, "was taken by one of the first miniature painters of Paris, and

we have thought it a good likeness of my brother. Yet, a comparison of it, merely as a conception of character, with that of my aunt, shows the difference which I feel to exist between the two artists. One was a good workman, and painted what he saw—the other was an inspired reader of the soul.”

But a sudden thought entered Paul's brain, as he heard these charming words, holding the miniature in his hand.

“Could you spare this little work of art,” he asked, “for the few days of your proposed visit to the Palefords? The contrast you have just drawn would interest the painter of the other picture, and I should like”—

“Oh certainly, certainly!” she interrupted Paul by exclaiming; “pray take it to him, if you please, for it will show him exactly *what I do not want*, in his picture of *me*. In my dull face” (she continued, smiling) “he might not find it so easy to overcome the literalness of the Ashly features.”

“Then you will sit to him?” echoed Paul.

“I should lose an invaluable opportunity, if I did not,” she replied (as Mrs. Cleverly called to her to get ready for some shopping they were to do together before sight-seeing), “and, if you please, Mr. Fane, I will trouble you, further, with the arrangement of this matter. If you will express to him how delighted I am with my aunt's portrait, and say that I will hold myself ready to sit at any

time that suits his convenience, after my return from Colonel Paleford's, I will really be very much obliged to you."

Enchanted as he was with his success, thus far, Paul buried his eyes in the miniature as the ladies left the room—his genius fully at work already on the conception with which it had inspired him. Guided by this faithful copy of the features, and remembering the expression of young Ashly's face as he saw him when he was gazing on the portrait of Sybil, he felt that he could repeat, in a sketch drawn even without the original, the triumph he had achieved in the picture of Miss Winifred. He could express with his pencil (what he could not in words) his deeper reading of the character of Sybil's lover, and, by presenting this to her, he could, perhaps, forward his rival's suit, and, at the same time, do something toward the reparation which he owed him. A very closely locked door of his tangled destiny seemed opening with this new opportunity.

"Shall we take a walk while they are gone?" suddenly broke in a gentle voice upon his reverie.

The color flushed into Paul's face as he remembered that he was alone with Mary—for the first time since so long a parting, and requiring to be reminded of it!—and with a confused vehemence, expressing rather more willingness than was quite natural, he sprang to his feet with an

assent. The Ducal Gardens were close by—they had the morning before them—it would be very delightful—would Mary get her bonnet at once and come out in the noon sun, so pleasant at that time of year!

But, over this confidential walk in the most beautiful garden-wilderness of the world—a first unrestrained interview, and between two so bound, by many a reason, to be, then and thus, happier than in their whole lifetime before—there hung, somehow, an insurmountable restraint! Conversation, of course, was abundant enough, with the inquiries that each had to make. Of mere information to exchange, there was quite sufficient to occupy the time—precluding, at least, the risk against which was given the warning of his mother's letter—but, over and above the choice of topics, and with no approach to love-making any way likely or possible, there was still room for a sympathy of the most tender confidingness and frankness; and this, inexplicably and mortifyingly, Paul felt to be wanting!

One vampire thought after another was struggled with, in the voiceless background of his mind, during that haunted walk. The chance disparagement of the work of his pencil by Mary, while another had so keenly appreciated it—the presence of Miss Ashly with its unrevealable secret of influence—the solemn bond resting upon him with the dying words of Sybil's mother, and binding him not to love the unsuspecting creature at his side—the

plot, which he had framed with the princess to prolong or secure her sisterly indifference, and the policy that would now be necessary for his own conduct, with these sacred and opposing claims calling equally upon his most delicate honor—these were phantoms present at his reunion with Mary, and not the less chilling in their influence upon the happiness of the hour, because her share in them must be untold. He felt reproached by every look from her soft eyes. In spite of every effort, he was conscious that he seemed, to her, abrupt and unlike himself. And, at her first expression of fatigue he was relieved, to turn once more toward the streets, where the novel objects of a strange city would preclude thought—leaving, presently, at her room-door, the one whom, but a few hours before, he would have said he most wished to see, of all persons in the world, and (to his own astonishment as he realized it), rejoicing to be alone.

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. CLEVERLY had been several days in Florence ; and, in the drawing-room of the *suite* of furnished apartments which she had taken for the season, were collected four or five persons, who, though they had seemed to come very naturally together, were of very varied character and sympathies. It was the evening of the court reception and ball. Paul's friend the princess had kindly offered to present his two countrywomen, while the English minister was to present Miss Ashly ; and they were all here assembled, as the most convenient point of reunion, and were to have a cup of tea together before starting for the palace.

There was a restraint on the spirits of the company. The stiffness of the court costumes, seeming so out of place around a private tea-table, had something to do with it—the English minister and Paul, of course, in their full diplomatic uniforms, and Mrs. Cleverly and the princess in an array of ornament unusual even for

themselves. But Miss Ashly, who was staying with the Palefords, had been accompanied to town by her friend Sybil (to pass the night with her at Mrs. Cleverly's, and take her back, after the court-ball, to Casa G——), and, there, at the table, she now sat, in her dress of the deepest mourning, an unconscious contrast of sadness that was almost like a reproof to the gay adornments around her.

It was not without some difficulty that Mary Evenden had been persuaded to make one of the party, that night. She had no taste for gaiety, particularly of the ceremonious and ostentatious kind, and usually begged off, not only from Mrs. Cleverly's acceptances of hospitalities, but from the operas and public amusements, in the various cities through which they had passed. Consistency was one of her leading traits; and, as a humble clergyman's daughter, she made the choice always which her father's eye would approve—her natural taste, moreover, being almost exclusively artistic, and nothing giving her pleasure, in the way of amusement, unless tributary to this. To her constantly expressed wish that she might be allowed, by her friend, to be her private companion only, taking advantage of their stay in different places to see what was collected of the arts for study and improvement, but otherwise wholly unobserved and uncared for, Mrs. Cleverly was usually considerably yielding—but of this

court-ball, in a palace which was the very sanctuary of Art, the good chaperon had made a point. She was sure Mary would be agreeably surprised with the splendors she would see, and thank her afterwards for having insisted upon her going.

Silent and ill at ease sat Mary, under that reluctant preparation for pleasure, however. While the restraint, upon the others of the circle, merely made them more coldly courteous and self-possessed, it was, to her, an embarrassment that amounted to an awkwardness. She held herself in a constrained position, robbed of all her natural grace by the dress to which she was so unaccustomed; and over her features, in which there was usually so calm and healthful a distribution of color, there was now a feverish flush, confusing and obscuring altogether the intellectual delicacy of the expression. Of that spiritual elevation of beauty, which Paul had described so glowingly a few days before to the princess, and which his imagination had kept so long, as the cherished ideal by which all others were excluded from his heart, there was now scarce a trace! Mary Evenden—he was mortified and irritated to see—looked even common-place and inferior.

But, with every effort to shut at least the eyes of his taste and imagination, it was impossible not to see the contrast that was beside her. Sybil Paleford, from

various incidental causes, had probably never before been so beautiful—certainly, to Paul, had never seemed so miraculously supplied with all he had before thought possible as heightening additions to her beauty. Among these over-gay costumes, her deep mourning had, in the first place, a singularly marked impressiveness; but, to her peculiar character of loveliness, it was, in itself, of all possible adornments, the most harmoniously becoming. In the two or three happy combinations of costume and expression which had, already, to his artist eye, made this marvellously fair creature seem as complete as Nature could allow one mortal to be, there was still room for the shade of thoughtful sadness, which now, so touchingly and so intellectually, overspread her tranquillity of feature. It was the charm (he could not but allow) which he had thought belonged alone to Mary Evenden—the look of the soul ever uppermost, and the outer form and its senses quite forgot! Yet there they now were—side by side—Mary Evenden and Sybil Paleford—and how could the comparison between them, unfavorable in all points to the one he was most bound to prefer, be denied or resisted?

The carriages were announced, and leave was to be taken of the one not included in the gay party; and the actual resentment that Paul felt, at the disparagement contained in this picture of contrast, might have shown itself

in his colder good-night and less cordial pressure of the hand—but there was a keen observer on the watch. The princess, his friend and confidant, had seen the comparison, as well as he. She knew that, with the natural generosity of affection, he would seek to compensate to Mary for the chance wrong she was thus suffering, and that this, both as a tenderness to her and an undeserved slight to Sybil, would be a hindrance to their well-laid plans for present neutrality. Taking Paul by the arm, therefore, she became an inevitable interruption to anything but a formal good-night, while she prevented his very possible offering of that arm to Mary—and (quite unconscious of the dramatic extent of the *chaperonage* which she was thus sharing with the princess) Mrs. Cleverly, in an eventful minute or two more, was on her way to the palace, with her party.

To the imaginative sculptress, the web of destiny, thus being woven, had assumed quite the excitement of a romance; but her sympathies had changed sides, since the morning over their work—when Paul had made confession of his embarrassments. She had, at that time, felt more interested for his fate as connected with Miss Paleford—thinking it the love with which, on a whole, he was likeliest to be happy. But, on the first day after the arrival of his friends, Paul had taken Mary to the studio of “Signor Valerio,” with full initiations into the secrets of the place; and to the spells of Art which there had all

their magic, and for which her whole life had so prepared her, he had delivered her over—his own engrossing work at the other studio (according to the princess's plan) being pleaded as his excuse for long mornings of absence.

But while, to the enthusiastically artistic girl, this romantic opportunity of play for her leading passion was like a strange fulfillment of a dream, Mary was, herself, a subject of close study and interest to her new friend. She and the princess, in fact, were curiously adapted for a sudden and unreserved intimacy. One was by nature what the other had become by completeness of culture—one had never learned what the other had spent her life in unlearning. Both were absolutely unaffected and simple—the link of resemblance which thus united them, however, being the meeting of two extremes. The princess, alone, of course understood the riddle. To the wild-flower American girl, the precious gem of character which so imitated her own was as natural as herself; and, with the most confiding unconsciousness, she made herself as much at home in the studio of the high-born sculptress as she would have done in Paul's attic with his mother.

In the exquisite appreciation of her genius, by so fresh-hearted and innocent a creature, the princess had found an enchantment that was new, even to herself. She had cultivated, hitherto, an Eden of solitude, on this point. Paul was the first, from her own level of society, who had been

admitted to the full knowledge of her artistic life ; but (of the other sex, and a citizen of the gay world which she strove to shut out)—he was, of course, somewhat to be guarded against as a flatterer—who might turn into a lover ; and, particularly as an admirer of her genius, whose admiration of beauty in statuary might be colored insensibly by passion. But, of the lovely forms which she had created with such skill of hand and such patient breathing of inspired thought into marble, here was what seemed like an embodiment of the very light of heaven that fell upon them—like the very atmosphere that enveloped them, taking shape and telling fondly of its privilege and pleasure. For truth and completeness, indeed, Mary's impressions were just such as light and air might receive and tell of. The princess felt that never could exist, in this world, praise and appreciation so pure and precious !

Mary's own genius sprang at once to this new field of Art. Sculpture had been a study kept always, till now, out of reach of her familiar knowledge and sympathies. She had thus, however, passed through its most valuable novitiate—discipline of hand and eye by practice with the pencil. It was as a scholar by whom all the elements had been well acquired, that she was ready for this branch of Art ; and the luxuriousness of the school in which she now found herself, the beauty of the models with which she was at liberty to pass her hours, and the generous willingness

and courtesy of the accomplished teacher at her side, gave it all an inexpressible fascination for her. She commenced her first lesson, in moulding the clay, on the first day that Paul left her with "Signor Valerio;" and, in the three or four long mornings that she had now passed in an atmosphere so exquisitely to her taste, there had been compressed almost the happiness of a life-time. And it was not strange that, after one of these mornings of unembarrassed completeness of enjoyment, the preparation for a court ball—with the stiffness of unaccustomed dress, the adornment by borrowed jewels, and the necessity (as she thought) of different manners and conversation—was, to Mary, little better than a painful bewilderment. It had taken all the gratitude that she felt for Mrs. Cleverly, to yield to the good lady's wishes by the consent to go, but it required more nerve than she could command to appear like herself under restraints which, to body and mind, were so wholly distasteful.

The arrival and *entree* had their usual routine of awkwardness for the inexperienced, and, in looking on at the presentation, Paul could not but see a second contrast very unfavorable to Mary in the quiet ease and self-possessed grace and dignity of Miss Ashly; but, the ceremony over, he had thought to draw aside his embarrassed playmate and friend, and, stationed at some unobserved point of view, pass his evening in diverting her thoughts with

comments on the scene and its characters. He made his way, accordingly, to the side where the presented guests fell back from the immediate neighborhood of the Grand Duke, and was about offering his arm to Mary.

"Pardon me!" said the Princess, stepping between them, with a playful imitation of a gentleman's bow, "Signor Valerio is to have the honor! And, my dear Fane," she continued, in an under tone, as he made room for her, "please, do not approach us again till the close of the ball. I will myself see that Miss Evenden is amused, and, for this evening, you chance to be the worst company she can have!"

And, taking Mary off to one of the raised seats at the end of the long hall, she seated herself by her side, and began what she understood better than almost anybody else in the world—making the most of what enchantments came along with music and the hours.

Paul discovered, presently, after a short fit of absent-mindedness, that he was in very close neighborhood to Miss Ashly. She smiled as his eyes met hers.

"You look very inconsolable, Mr. Fane!" she said; "but the princess thinks, probably, that Miss Evenden has come abroad for something else beside seeing her own countrymen."

"Consolable, I assure you," said Paul, offering his arm very promptly, "if I may be allowed to plead that the

same barrier does not prevent my playing the happy shadow to Miss Ashly."

"I was just going to propose the same thing to you, *in substance*," she said, emphasizing the play of words upon his expression—"that is to say, I was wishing your company, and for more substantial reasons than either making you happy as a shadow, or securing attention to myself. I wish, in fact, to interest you in the happiness of a certain third person."

Paul expressed his assent simply by a grave earnestness of look and movement, as he led the way to a promenade through the less crowded rooms. He was, for the moment, uncertain of his position. Miss Ashly had been three or four days at Casa G——, and he did not know how much more she had learned, in that time, of his intimacy with the family. He was not even certain, as yet, whether they had chanced to mention to her what they themselves knew—who it was that had painted the portraits of Miss Paleford and Miss Winifred. Her first remark relieved him upon this latter point, however.

"To defer my important request, for a moment," she said, "may I ask whether you have executed the commission with which I troubled you—making an engagement for my sittings, with your friend the painter?"

Paul drew a breath of relief. It was important for the completeness of the secret experiment of his life—(the

experiment he shamed to own, which had been to him of keener zest, thus far, than the trials of love or genius)—that, to Miss Ashly's confidence, and to whatever degree of intimacy she was likely to allow upon a common ground of acquaintance, he should first try his claim as a gentleman. As an artist, and especially as one to whom she was herself to sit for a portrait, there might be condescension in her politeness, or there might be vanity in the desire to please. He wished, for this evening, at least, to be upon the mere footing which society would ordinarily give him, as to any question of relative position, and—this ground-work now settled—he had nothing to do, of course, but to be as agreeable as was any way possible to Miss Ashly, who (unsuspicious of the problem she was solving) leaned at present so confidingly on his arm.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was evidently with her mind very much upon something else, that Miss Ashly pursued the conversation, as she and Paul lingered along by the pedestals of the statues, or stopped to look at one and another of the "old masters" that lined the walls. They talked of Florence and its climate, the looks of the grand duke, Austrian politics in Italy, the fashions and the pictures.

"Did I understand you," she said, at last, reverting to the subject which Paul had skillfully digressed from, "that this artist friend of yours speaks English?"

"It is his native language," said Paul, very safely.

"Ah, an Englishman! I might have known that, however," she went on presently to add, "for no foreigner would have read so well the physiognomy of an English family. I forget whether you mentioned his name?"

Paul was staggered. Here was a direct summons to surrender his secret! He felt the betraying blood flush into his temples, but presently made half a confession,

thinking it might be just possible that she would not jump to the conclusion at once.

"Why, to tell the truth, he is a former acquaintance of yours," he said, "but I was not to tell you his name. He was curious to know whether you would remember him."

Miss Ashly's answer poured oil upon the long-hidden irritation at Paul's heart!

"He is modest—for a man of his genius—certainly," she said, with a smile of evident pleasure at the compliment she had found for herself in the explanation. "He must bear the mark of his superiority, of course, for observant eyes, and such men are not easily forgotten. I should feel very much ashamed to have met the painter of those pictures—even to have had the pleasure of his acquaintance (as you say I have)—without recognizing his quality; besides" (she added, after a moment's pause), "he must be a very high-bred man, by the air of birth and breeding which he has given to his subjects, and which can be alone given by the instinct of the artist's own habits and manners."

The contradiction to all this, which had stuck in Paul's memory like the barb of an arrow—(her own lack of recognition of that same artist *once* and complete forgetfulness of him *now*)—was not enough to spoil the sweetness of her words. But he wished to prolong a little, the

window-opening she had given to the closeness of his heart.

"And do you think," he asked, "that the quality of the man is always recognizable, in the ordinary acquaintance of society?"

"Yes," she replied, after a moment's turning the question over in her mind, "I think we usually recognize superiority—at least, I have always thought I did, myself, though we by no means pay homage to it always, or even show that we are conscious of its presence. A woman's pride, policy, vanity, reserve, diffidence, or any one of a hundred reasons, may prevent her giving the least sign of being aware that a man she *could admire* is near her—but she treasures none the less the memory of having met him."

"A myth of consolation very sweet to believe in," murmured Paul.

"And that reminds me of the request I was intending to make of you, Mr. Fane," said Miss Ashly, dropping his arm and taking a seat for a *tête-à-tête*—"a request which I will preface with the apology that Colonel Paleford told me you had more influence than any one else in the matter it refers to."

"My friend, the colonel, honors me," said Paul, "whatever the matter be—though I wonder"—

He hesitated, for (in his surprise at Colonel Paleford's

frankness in confessing, as well as sagacity in divining that influence), he was about to betray his anticipation of what it would be more delicate for Miss Ashly to speak of first. She proceeded after waiting a moment for the unfinished sentence.

"I should add, perhaps, that it seemed to be an expression let slip unguardedly by the colonel, and that he turned the conversation, unwilling, apparently, to say more upon the subject. But," she added, with a smile, after an instant's hesitation, "remembering the discovery I had already made, of your power of magnetizing—(my Aunt Winnie's familiar confidence being a very wonderful conquest, I assure you, Mr. Fane!)—I thought the influence he ascribed to you very probable. At all events, with the importance of the object in view, it was worth while to try to enlist it in our favor."

"And this object?"—inquired Paul, already anticipating her answer.

"Is the winning of Miss Sybil Paleford for my brother."

As Miss Ashly thus briefly expressed her wish, she looked very scrutinizingly at Paul, evidently with a curiosity as to whether he had any feeling of his own to which this proposition might run counter. The tone of his reply, was very reassuring, to her.

"You will be surprised to hear that I had already a plot in hand to bring the match about."

But, as he made this mere reference to the portrait of her brother (which he had been employed upon for four or five days), Paul became, for the first time, aware of a lurking reluctance in his hitherto willing task of furthering the love of Mr. Ashly. The image of Miss Paleford, as he had seen her that evening in her mourning dress, and with the exquisite sadness of a mourning heart impressed upon her beautiful features, strangely took the place at present, of all his previous impressions of her—displacing, too, unaccountably to himself, the image of Mary Evenden, which had hitherto filled all the foreground of his fancy. He could see no other Sybil Paleford than the beautiful mourner—no other face, than hers with its tender pensiveness, even as he looked now at Miss Ashly. There had been a moment's pause, only, during which these sudden convictions had crowded upon his mind. It was interrupted by a laugh from his wondering companion.

"You make me feel," she said, "like the traveller in the German story, who could never knock at a door without the same man's making his appearance on the inside. I find you before me, somehow in all my supposed secrets. May I ask what project it is, in my brother's favor, for which (let me say beforehand), I am already very grateful?"

"I must reserve the disclosure of it, with your permission," said Paul—"the principal wheel of the machinery

not being as yet, very certain of completion. But (if I may venture to ask the question), are we quite sure that it is to be 'a course of true love' which is to be made to 'run smooth' with our aid and contrivance?"

Paul scarce confessed to himself the real motive which lay hidden under this apparently very considerate question—the hope, that, in Miss Ashly's fuller explanation of the probabilities of the match, he might find some excuse to himself for less zeal in its favor. Her reply gave somewhat of a new color to her own interest in it, and—(what with the significancy of the gift of which he now found the bestowal in his own hands, and the side-inferences as to his own value by the same standard, in the mind of the Aunt)—he listened more attentively even than Miss Ashly was aware of—interrupting her only by monosyllables of surprise or encouragement.

"As to my brother," she commenced, "there is no doubt but what he is very thoroughly in love. It is, I believe, the first time in his life, and his temperament is phlegmatic and unimpressible; and so it is likely to go seriously with him—either for happiness or disappointment. He has made a full confession of his feeling on the subject, to me, and I have very naturally, the earnestness of a *confidante* in his cause. But, aside from this, and, aside from the devotion of an affectionate sister to his happiness, there is a family pride enlisted in the matter—outweighing in

this case (if I can manage to explain its peculiarity to you), most of the ordinary desirablenesses of a match."

Paul turned his inquiring eyes more fully towards her as she paused, for he was not aware that the relative position of the two families was so much in favor of the Palefords.

"It is not the common family pride, that would seek honor by alliance with high descent, you will understand," she continued. We are vain enough to think our own blood better than that of most of the titled families around us—at least sufficiently pure to give distinction to any with which it chose to mingle. But, with the best blood, there should be also the best look of personal superiority; and this (I may say to you Mr. Fane, since you have brought me to the confessional), is a hobby that amounts to a monomania in our family. With the other usual considerations already provided for—wealth enough and blood pure enough—we wish all who belong to us to *look it*, undeniably. The Ashlys and their descendants must, if possible, be kept recognizable by their exterior—wherever seen, wearing the superiority which tells its rank unasserted. We think it due to our race accordingly, while we represent it, to engraft nothing upon it that is not perfect in its *physique*—healthy, beautiful, and of noble presence."

"All of which Miss Paleford certainly is," echoed Paul.

"Yes, and the match is very agreeable to us in other respects," she continued. "The Palefords and Ashlys have been friends and neighbors for centuries, and we know all their qualities of character. They are incapable of pettiness or guile—essentially lofty-natured, frank, brave and true. Gentler or purer blood beats in no heart on earth than in Sybil Paleford's!"

As Miss Ashly's cold eye kindled with the glow of this generous tribute to her friend—her neck lifting unconsciously from the bend forward that was usually somewhat ungraceful, and her proudly cut mouth changing from its habitual disdain to a less curving arch of genial enthusiasm—Paul took the imprint upon his memory of what he should reproduce in her portrait. She had given the mysterious artist a "sitting," unaware. But there was more than this, and more than sympathy of homage to beauty, in the apparently absorbed attention of the courteous *attaché*. In spite of a half-conscious reluctance at his heart, Paul felt that resistless welding of a new link to the heart which comes with timely corroboration by another's praise. His freshly received impression of Sybil's beauty and character—as new that evening as if he had never before seen her—was graven in, by this eloquent homage (from one who chanced to be, for him, the highest authority of her own sex), as by the point of a diamond. But his zeal of partnership,

in the task of securing her love for another, grew colder as he listened.

"To one side, then, certainly, I think," recommenced Miss Ashly, "the match would bring happiness—to my brother, and to his home and kindred. We know, also, that it would be a most welcome alliance to Colonel Paleford."

"Great make-weights in the scale!" said Paul, giving voice with an effort to a conviction which he could not shut out.

"Are they not? And, against these and my brother's wooing, which, if not very demonstrative, is, at least, sincere and undivided, there is only (as I inferred from what Colonel Paleford said) the obstacle of a romantic whim—a girlish horror of making a mercenary match, and consequent distaste to my brother as a man of fortune!"

"To be overcome, I take it, if at all, by touching the romance of her nature, in some way," said Paul, talking very mechanically, but, at the same time, expressing his sincere opinion on the point.

"You have already given it thought, I have the woman's instinct to see," said Miss Ashly, with a smile. "And is the project you have in hand (if I may venture to make the inquiry), based upon this key to our affections?"

"If successful," he replied, "it will cause Mr. Ashly to be seen by Miss Paleford with just that difference—a romantic sentiment in his face instead of its habitual imperturbability."

"You are a magician—I am quite prepared to be convinced!" said Miss Ashly; "and" (she continued, turning to Paul with a genial relaxation of her proud features, but in the expression of which his keen eye saw lurking the something still withheld—the still unsundered reservation of an habitual consciousness of superiority), "it is with this excuse that I account to myself for such extraordinary confidence in a stranger. Bless me, Mr. Fane! how little I have known you, after all! And to be telling secrets to you in this way! And asking a favor of you, too, which I really do not think I could ask of another man living!"

Paul bowed very low, with a mock look of incredulity.

"It is my friend the necromancer, however—not a Mr. Fane of a week's acquaintance—whom I thus wonderfully trust," she added playfully, as she rose from her seat, "and, if we eventually owe to you this jewel, so coveted to grace the Ashly name, I shall, at least, feel a life-long gratitude to your kindness (that is to say, to your hocus-pocus!)—and I leave it hopefully in your hands. I suppose," she asked, as Mrs. Cleverly came

in sight, evidently in search of them, "we can take no farther counsel as to your project, at present?"

"Not till we meet at your aunt's, with the nameless artist," answered Paul, very mystifyingly, and the next moment, addressing a remark to Mrs. Cleverly, and so ending the *tête-à-tête* with Miss Ashly, leaving her, however, still more puzzled than before by his closing words.

The remainder of the evening passed off very dreamily to Paul, though he was mechanically and very acceptably unremitting in his attendance upon Mrs. Cleverly. In their promenades he came several times in sight of Mary Evenden; and he was somewhat surprised, with all his abstraction, to see how her eyes failed to follow him, after each sisterly glance of recognition; but, with the princess and her circle of friends, she seemed absorbed and entirely at her ease; and Paul could not but feel that his attentions (which he was to show her but for the peremptory orders to the contrary), were anything but missed! "Signor Valerio," to whose side she kept close, was sufficing for her present happiness, without a doubt—he saw it in the face he knew so well. But there was a stronger feeling than jealousy in his heart, which took the uppermost place again, as, each time, she passed out of sight; and, with this feeling, at last, Paul found himself struggling, as the morning broke on his sleepless eyes after the ball.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FROM various circumstances, there had been a brief calm in the troubled waters of Paul's destiny. The delay of Miss Winifred Ashly in returning to Florence, had deferred, from time to time, the proposed "sitting," which was to be given to Miss Mildred Ashly at her aunt's rooms; and a slight illness of Paul's, with the mourning seclusion of the inhabitants of Casa G——, had just sufficed to prevent his meeting, for a week or two, with any of the Paleford circle. His illness, however, though dispiriting and unfitting him for visits, had not wholly confined him to his lodgings; and, joining Mrs. Cleverly and Mary Evenden over their breakfast, on his way, he had usually crept around to Blivins's studio, and beguiled the day with irregular labor at his easel. He had thus finished (with the aid of the miniature) the portrait of Mr. Ashly, which was to act as his atonement for a rivalry unjustly resentful; and, though, as a piece of artistic work, it was now very

satisfactory to his eye, he had achieved it through many struggles with himself and with very conflicting feelings.

His friend Tetherly having gone to Rome (taking with him a note of introduction to Miss Winifred, with whose portrait he had been so captivated); Blivins, silently at work as usual, made happy by the constant company of his brother artist; Mary Evenden entirely absorbed with "Signor Valerio's" teachings in Art, and Mrs. Cleverly abundantly attended to, by friends of her own whom she had met at court; Paul was pretty much at the mercy of his own thoughts. He had found these, and his comparative solitude, rather more burthensome than he could well bear—on one cloudy and gloomy day—and, rather as a relief of desperation than with any feeling of readiness for the task, he sent a note to Casa G——, making an appointment for the expected "sitting." With their leave, he wrote to say, the nameless artist would come out on the morrow and make, there, a commencement of Miss Ashly's portrait, instead of waiting longer for her aunt's return from Rome.

The messenger had returned with a very willing assent to the proposition; and, early in the forenoon of the next day, Paul was in the vetturino of his friend Giuseppe, going round by Blivins's studio to pick up his materials, on the way to Casa G——; when, at the corner of the Duomo, he was met by the princess, driving in to her own

daily occupation. To stop and exchange kind inquiries was a matter of course ; but it ended in the drawing up of the vehicles to the door of the cathedral, the two occupants taking arms for a confidential stroll and *tête-à-tête* under the dim shadows of the long and vaulted aisles. On hearing where Paul was bound, with his morning errand, the philosophic sculptress had thought of something it was perhaps timely to speak of, as to the secret of which she had been made the confidant.

"You will see Miss Paleford to-day," she said, as they paced slowly along over the tessellated floor.

"I presume she will be present during the sitting," he replied, coloring slightly, "though I should certainly be less embarrassed with my work if she were not. I should very much prefer, indeed, that the portrait of Mr. Ashly, which I take with me, should be first presented to her in my absence, and by his sister."

"And what portion of this two-fold embarrassment would be removed," asked the princess, "if Miss Paleford were no longer the forbidden water at the lip of my friend Tantalus?"

Paul hesitated a little, with the consciousness of the truth of what was thus boldly assumed by the question, for there was a degree of truth in it, at least, of which he had not yet made confession, even to himself.

"There would be less embarrassment—certainly!" he

said, with a smile, followed by a look of very puzzled inquiry.

"I do not know how agreeable it will be to you," continued the princess, "even to know that you are at liberty to love the one lady, since it involves the possible mortification that you are not loved by the other."

Paul half stopped in his walk, but she proceeded without noticing his surprise.

When we conversed last upon the embarrassments in the matter, we took for granted that the two claims for your heart—one made by your mother's letter, and one by Mrs. Paleford's—were based upon knowledge that could scarce be mistaken; and, as to Mary Evenden, I not only thought her attachment to you a matter of course, but, on seeing her, I changed my opinion as to the one who was most ready to make you immediately happy. My judgment and my sympathies all went with your early play-mate."

"Well?" inquired Paul, stopping short, in astonished expectation.

"Well," said the princess, "it is my belief, now, that there is no tender passion whatever, in Mary's childish attachment to you—a regard for her happiness, therefore, if I am correct, being no obstacle, at present, to your loving some one else."

With all the hidden willingness that there might have

been for this news, Paul found its open announcement somewhat staggering.

"I do not know that I can fully explain it to you," the princess went on to say, "for it proves an unsusceptibility, which I do not myself quite comprehend ; but I have been wholly absorbed, of late, in my study of this lovely girl's nature ; and, what with her complete confidingness and unreserve towards me as a woman, and my own skill gained by habitual curiosity in the analysis of character, I do not think I am mistaken in my inference."

Paul could not but admit that better authority was hardly possible.

"I was first led to give a thought to it," she continued, "by observing, at the court ball, the contented unconsciousness and tranquillity with which she saw the entire monopoly of your attentions by another lady—drawn off into a corner, as you were, by Miss Ashly, and evidently giving the most deferential interest to the topic between you. This looked a shade beyond what I could believe, even of transatlantic disinterestedness, in love ; but I still thought it possible that the evening's jealousy might have been exhausted upon the lovely Niobe in her mourning weeds, whom we had seen at the tea-table."

It grew evident to Paul that he had been very sagaciously watched.

"The occasional mention of Miss Paleford, which I

made in the course of the next day, satisfied me, however, that of this more trying and undeniable eclipse, she had been equally unconscious; and, with this confirmation of my wonder, I began to look upon it as a problem worth the studying—no less from fidelity to the confidence you had reposed in me, than from the novelty of woman's nature, which it promised curiously to develop. Over our work, therefore, in these long mornings, I have so managed as to turn the conversation upon the abstract theory of love—the personal experience and habit of thought being called upon, of course, for illustration and argument.”

“And she ignores the tender passion, altogether, you say?” asked Paul, rather skeptically.

“Not in others,” replied the princess; “and that is one of the points that puzzle me; for she seems to have given it constant study and observation as an important element of Art. She wishes to know why the best statues have been moulded and the best pictures painted, from the kindling of this fire in the blood and brain—wondering, with the coolest philosophy of self-knowledge, why she herself feels no glimmer of such inspiration.”

“Yet she is very affectionate in her nature,” Paul musingly said.

“It was the distinction she made, in her argument,” pursued the princess, “that, with affection for her friends which would sacrifice even her life for them if necessary—

affection which had neither stint nor reserve in its devotedness—she still felt no instinct of the love that was expressed in Art and described in poetry. And she expressed her wonder, not only at the absence of any feeling which she could recognise as love, but at her strongly instinctive preference for a life without it. She said that, spite of reasoning and poetry to the contrary, it seemed to her like a general law from which the few higher natures should be exempt—as there were those who were not subject to the curse of getting their bread by the sweat of their brow—and that the life of genius, particularly, could not seem privileged or intellectually set apart and perfected, without freedom from an influence so common—with all its commonness and sensuality, too, so overpoweringly engrossing. And the statuary in my little studio,” the princess smilingly continued, “served her for illustrations of her meaning—the figure of my Antinoüs, especially, which she thought was too beautiful for love. How is it, she asked, that I can pour out my whole soul in appreciation and admiration of the beauty of that form, and yet feel that it has attained its highest point of expression and inspiration by its insensibility to love?”

“Pleased, of course; with your Daphne—flying from love,” Paul added.

“It was upon Miss Evenden’s turning to this,” said the princess, “that I took advantage of the opportunity to get

from her—quite accidentally, as it appeared—the confession I have yet to tell you of. As she stood near the pedestal of Daphne, with the moulding-pencil in her hand, pointing to the refusal expressed in the movement of the shoulders, I hinted at a possible similarity between this and a future consciousness of her own—at a proposal from Mr. Fane, or somebody else.”

“And did she then speak of me?” Paul asked, very eagerly.

“Take a long breath for fortitude to listen, my unloved friend!” the princess proceeded, half playfully, half doubtfully. “She expressed herself with the most *naïve* definiteness and simplicity as to the very gentleman in question—complimenting you, however, with calling it the very case in point, for her argument. There was Paul, she said, whom she had every reason in the world to fall in love with. She believed, from certain indications, that his mother expected it of her—she thought it probable, indeed, though he had never spoken on the subject, that Paul expected it himself. Yet she had hoped that, in his absence, he would form a passionate attachment to some one else, leaving her to resume her sister’s place in his affection on his return. She would have been much happier to have found him married, on her arrival in Florence. There was at present a restraint between herself and her old playmate (she added, after a little hesitation, quite

sadly), and she could only explain it by the want of sympathy—her own unavoidable lack of response to some feeling he had been cherishing towards her.”

Paul felt that there was light thus thrown on much that he had found inexplicable, in Mary’s manner. He listened with expectant attention.

“I must salve the wound for you, however,” the princess proceeded, with her tone of natural and earnest kindness, “for the charming girl went on most eloquently to picture her companionship with your genius—spoke glowingly of the sweetness of what came from your loftier mind—thought you would be perfect if you could become indifferent to all life but that of intellect;—and declared that she anticipated that sublimation of your nature, and her own fellowship with it, as her greatest resource for happiness in coming years.”

“And is it possible, then,” asked Paul, whose interest in Mary (as a problem he had failed to decipher) began to be awakened, “that there can be a woman’s heart wanting to a nature otherwise of such completeness?”

“Her luxuriant beauty would certainly tell a different story,” said the princess, “and that is what puzzles me. She is of faultlessly free development, in her figure—of the fullness of lip and features which is thought usually to indicate susceptibility—her motion is almost voluptuously

pliant and unguarded—and the expression of her deep blue eye is even remarkable for its feminine tenderness. There should be a woman's heart under such a covering!"

"Dormant, perhaps!" suggested Paul.

"Why, if so, you have strangely failed to awaken it," replied his friend, "but it may be only a stronger instance of that unequal tardiness of Nature which I have often observed. We are not born with all our faculties ready to begin; nor do the after-awakenings come to all natures alike—that is, with the same order of succession or length of delay. I believe" (she added with a smile of inquiry) "the moustache of your lordlier sex develops sooner on some lips than on others. The mental faculties, we know, are very irregular as to their time of ripeness, and even as to their first indication of existence. Poetry wakens late, in some bosoms. Why should not Passion—in the coldly pure heart of woman, spell-bound also by her very balance and harmony of fullness and completeness—waken still later than the faculties which are called upon by her education? It would not be wonderful if it should slumber till comparatively late in life—and, indeed, I have known more than one instance of a romantic first love kindled after youth was well past."

Paul might have given an instance of this, if he had been at liberty to speak of Miss Winfred Ashly—but the

passing thought and its association reminded him of the errand he was bound upon, and he hastened to close the conversation by reverting to its main point.

"Your kind counsel, then," he said, "releases me altogether from one of my two obligations—enjoining upon me, of course, to devote myself exclusively to the fulfillment of the other—not loved by Mary Evenden, I may freely take my chance of being loved by Sybil Paleford?"

"Pardon me," said the princess, "if I guard you against too sweeping an interpretation of what you term my 'counsel.' I have meant merely to advise you of the fact that you were *equitably* at liberty to accept the dying mother's bequest, and love Miss Paleford. While my reason gives you this for your guidance, however, my imagination and feeling lean quite the other way."

Paul had too much on his mind for expression, but he looked inquiringly at the princess.

"I mean that I think it would be the most beautiful of romances, to make a love-vigil of Mary Evenden—to watch and wait for the waking of her sleeping heart. With so much already won—the mind quite devoted to you, and the fair creature all yours except the lacking consent of passion yet unawakened—it seems but a story of which the sequel is withheld."

"Wedlock to be deferred, to close the book?" asked

Paul, with a smile, as he handed his friend into her carriage.

"Not necessarily," she said. "Mary Evenden might be very happy as a wife, with only sympathy of tastes and pursuits ; and a life passed in hoping still to touch the heart, would turn many a forced match into poetry."

Paul beckoned to his vetturino, as the princess drove off with this final addition to her tangle of contradictory suggestions ; and, in a few minutes, freighted with his materials from the studio, he was on his way to Colonel Paleford's ; very little prepared, either by what he had now heard or by his state of health and spirits, for the drama of accumulating events opening before him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON arriving at Casa G——, Paul found Colonel Paleford sitting solitary and thoughtful under the roofed gateway at the entrance of the vineyard, and it was evidently a relief and pleasure to him to see his friend. In the course of a few minutes' conversation, on their way to the house, it chanced to be mentioned that the secret of the nameless artist had been kept. They had not felt at liberty to speak of it without Paul's permission—Miss Ashly, of course, at present, expecting a visit from a stranger.

The light of the little drawing-room was soon arranged, and the easel and its belongings made ready for "the sitting." They still waited for the appearance of the ladies; but, in taking up his pencil, as they conversed, Paul found, both how ill he was, and how much his depressed spirits had been already tried, that day. By the nicely understood *feel* of his wand of genius, he

was reminded of his trembling hand, and of the doubtfulness of the calm of inner strength that was to be particularly needed for the critical ordeal before him. With the long-cherished dream of his youth just crushed in his heart—a fresh touchstone to be applied to the point of his secret pride and weakness—the cause of his now most dreaded rival to be magnanimously forwarded by a plot of his own contriving—and the skill of the artist, notwithstanding all these deranging and disturbing causes, expected to confirm, by his present work, its previous triumphs of art and discrimination—he literally felt the strength insufficient. He was about to confess as much, at an expression of sympathy from Colonel Paleford, who had remarked his paleness and debility, when Miss Ashly's step was heard upon the stair.

The greeting was frank and cordial, as she entered, with the pressure given by her hand to Paul's.

"A very artistic arrangement," she said, looking round upon the half-darkened room, "but where is the artist?"

Paul took the pencil from the little shelf of the easel standing near him, and, with a bow of mock ceremony, made the sign of the cross upon his own forehead.

"Our friend Fane," said Colonel Paleford, smiling at the blank incredulity with which the silent announcement was received, "is the nameless artist we have been admiring all this while !

"And the picture of Miss Sybil?" asked the astonished guest, beginning already to be formal.

"Was his work, I believe!" said the colonel.

"And my aunt!" she almost breathlessly added.

"Miss Winifred Ashly did me the honor to sit to me, also," said Paul, with the deferential air of an employed artist.

There were too many things to remember, and to rearrange in accordance with this startling surprise, for Miss Mildred Ashly to recover very readily. She looked at the easel and at Paul alternately, and seemed to be trying to identify them with something in her mind. Feeling somewhat embarrassed with her scrutiny, he went to his portfolio-case which leaned against the wall.

"And here," he said, producing his crayon copy of her brother, and setting it upon the drawing-board, "is a present from the same nameless artist, which I presume will be very welcome to Miss Paleford. I have endeavored to show, in my crayon portrait, the enthusiasm and nobleness of Mr. Ashly's face—wanting which, I thought that the miniature you lent me had done injustice to his hidden qualities and character."

There was an involuntary utterance of admiring pleasure by Miss Ashly, as she first looked at the drawing; but a recovery of her attitude of reserve, a moment after, and

a just perceptible return of her long-remembered and indescribable impenetrability of countenance, once more staggered Paul. He was not reassured or comforted, even by the expressive movement of Colonel Paleford, who, after looking a moment at the portrait of Mr. Ashly, passed near where stood the young friend whom he thus considered generously disinterested, silently pressing the hand that Paul was resting on his hip.

The pause became embarrassing.

"I have your own portrait already in my mind, Miss Ashly!" said Paul, wishing to change the subject, and feeling that he must begin soon upon his morning's work, or lose the strength for it altogether; "I have chanced to see *you*, also" (he added, with forced playfulness), "when the *inner* face of the Ashlys shone through."

But this significant and rather desperate betrayal of his secret thought, as to the present and *outer* look of the Ashly features, seemed but to confirm her hesitating reserve.

"Pardon me, Mr. Fane!" she said, "I was not aware upon whose attention I was——making such demands! It had not occurred to me that your valuable time was that of——an artist. I, really——you must excuse me, Mr. Fane!——I could only sit to you——professionally!"

"There was in this broken explanation (and particularly in the concluding word, and in the accent and look with

which it was uttered), a whole volume for Paul's well-prepared comprehension to read. He saw at once the full length and breadth of the feelings now struggling in Miss Ashly's mind, and he felt that the line between himself and her—the long hated line of difference of rank and position—was re-drawn as with a pen of fire. There was but this softening of it, that, as an *attaché* and with the opportune power of rendering very important service, he had been unquestionably taken into her confidence; but even this might be attributed to overruling reasons of interest, and it was an admission of equality and willing obligation, now very suddenly withdrawn, on discovering him to be an artist. With the rapid crowding of this unwelcome conviction on his mind, Paul's natural promptitude at grappling with uncertain shadows came to his aid.

"If Miss Ashly chooses to be my first customer," he said, quietly, "she is very welcome to so honor me! Though I have not painted portraits for money, thus far, it was because I was an apprentice in Art. It is to be my profession!"

Paul caught sight of Colonel Paleford's face, as he turned to his easel to arrange for a beginning, in apparently undisturbed accordance with Miss Ashly's wish; and there was an approval in the old soldier's calm eye, which repaid him for much that he was suffering unseen.

But the entrance of Miss Paleford turned the attention for a moment. She glided in with her usual stately grace, as freshly and simply cordial as she was renewedly and wonderfully beautiful; and her father, exercising his polished tact as a man of the world, stated the embarrassment to her, mock seriously, as an amusing scruple of over-delicacy on the part of Miss Ashly.

"Suppose we compromise the matter, my dear Mildred," said the unsuspecting Sybil, "by your accepting the portrait from *me*? I am quite at liberty, I am very sure, to accept it, myself, from Mr. Fane, and we shall thus bridge over the chasm, without calling that hateful 'money' to our aid."

"But you are not aware, my child," said the Colonel, "how deeply you are in Mr. Fane's debt, already. He has done a masterpiece of work for *you*, which you have not yet seen. There" (the father continued, as Paul set the portrait of Mr. Ashly on his easel) "is what, *he* thinks, represents truly the brother of our friend."

It was a long and silent gaze now bent upon that crayon portrait by Sybil Paleford. In every one of the three hearts, beating almost within hearing of hers, there was a throb of suspense, of which each dreaded the betrayal as a secret of his own—and the voice of the beautiful mourner first broke the silence:

"How strangely admirable!"

Paul heard—and saw the look given to his work by the large soft eyes that were now the world to him—and, by those expressive words, he knew that the dreaded success of his artistic effort was complete, his own genius throwing a new and more favorable light upon the character and features of his rival. He forgot, in the anguish of the moment, Miss Ashly and her torture of his pride! It would be necessary, in another instant, to meet and answer Sybil's look, or the expression of her thanks in words. He nerved resolution and summoned up the calmness for lip and eye.

But Nature was overtaken! The giddiness of the enfeebled invalid had already reminded him, once or twice, that he had both fasted longer than usual, and passed his accustomed noon hour of repose from mental labor. His sight was not clear without an effort, and his brain grew faint. Suddenly his feet felt uncertain under him. Miss Paleford turned to speak, and he made one struggle to seem as he had been gathering strength to seem at that crisis—but it was too late. Around swam all the objects in the room—furniture, people, windows—and Paul fell senseless to the floor.

It appeared to be twilight when consciousness once more lifted the eyelids of the sleeper. He found himself alone,

and lying upon the broad cushions of a lounge, in a room that seemed not at first familiar to him ; but which the sight of his easel in the corner, and the portrait of Mrs. Paleford on the wall, soon recalled to him as the drawing-room of Casa G——. He gradually remembered the errand with which he had come thither, and the trials and combining circumstances of that morning, to him so eventful ; and he then recalled his debility by illness, and the sudden failure of his strength, while preparing to take a first sitting from Miss Ashly ; and the truth became evident. He had fainted, for the first time in his life, and, falling asleep while yet scarce conscious of his restoration, had been left by the family to his repose.

Languid and spiritless, Paul lay, struggling with his fast up-crowding thoughts. Not a sound was to be heard ; and, as he became more used to the shadows of the dim-lighted room, he once more rallied his remembrance of each well-known article of furniture and ornament ; and, by aid of these associations, recovered, link by link, the chain of resolve and duty which had there been bound about his heart. It was difficult. He could not but confess to himself—more than ever before, as he lay undisturbed, with the atmosphere of that beauty-haunted and dream-hallowed house silent around him—that he loved her who was the angel of the place. The mother, whose tender look now fell upon him from the portrait on the wall, seemed again

to offer her dying gift—the priceless daughter's love, which it had been his bitter task to assist his rival more certainly to win. The release given to him in the knowledge of the indifference of Mary Evenden—no longer a surprise—seemed a welcome ordaining of Fate, in his destiny of love. His whole soul, as he now lay, re-waking and fancy-wild, upon that invalid couch, sprang to Sybil Paleford.

But there was a sudden revulsion to the incomplete and wayward tide of his returning thoughts. He remembered her countenance and her expressive words as she had looked at his portrait of Mr. Ashly! His heart sickened and grew dark. The possibility—nay, the certainty almost—that his own unclasping of that locked book, and his own laying open of the hidden leaves of character, had induced her to read with new eyes, and with approval unfelt before! It seemed to him more and more fatally true, as he recalled the scene, that, to the gaze of the admiring mourner, it was a revelation of Mr. Ashly's countenance and inner nature which was welcomed with delight. Her looks, her words, said it. They had betrayed unmistakably the dawn of a new feeling. She already loved the absent brother of her friend!

With these conflicting and darkening feelings brooding over the feeble beatings of his heart, Paul was startled by the scarce perceptible moving of the latch. The door opened timidly, and, with the streaming of the dying glow

of the west into the darkened room, he saw the outlined form of Sybil in her mourning weeds. She stood listening for a moment, and then noiselessly and softly entered. Paul did not stir. It occurred to him that the desk of Colonel Paleford was near the head of the couch on which he lay, and there might be something wanted from this, to bring those gliding feet thus noiselessly into the room. She probably thought to achieve her errand, and pass out without disturbing the sleeper.

With closed lids, and the thought that, by the delicacy which propriety required, he should make no stir, nor speak, except in answer, Paul lay breathlessly still. The spirit-ear of love, even without the whisper of her moving dress, would have told him of her approach! His heart beat faster and warm, as the folds of her rustling weeds touched the arm that hung languidly over the couch. The desk was near, but she stood turned to his pillow. He thought his pulse would become audible! Her gaze was on his face. He thrilled with the flood of light from her soft eyes—his lips and brow bathed as by a magnetism of indescribable thrill. Suddenly she stooped. He felt her warm breath upon his cheek. Two swift kisses were impressed upon his eyes—and, like a shadow of a cloud, she vanished from the room!

To thank God for the night that was before him—to long for the morning to stay away, and for life to be but

the prolonging of that sweet dream and the wild joy he had now to be alone with—to wrap himself in bliss beyond words, with the certainty that SYBIL PALEFORD LOVED HIM—was Paul's tumult of thought, with those kisses on his eyes!



CHAPTER XXIX.

WITH the invalid return of the artist to Florence, the next morning, the first sitting of Miss Ashly for her portrait reverted to its original place of appointment, the apartment of her Aunt Winifred; and, as Paul was likely to have the earliest knowledge of the arrival of the reserved spinster from Rome, the family at Casa G—— were to depend on him for their news and for the arrangement of their visits to town. Looking forward with some dread at present, to any fresh trial of his nerves—(such as full control over his pencil would be, in the united presence of the aunt and her niece, and probably Miss Paleford)—he was very glad of the respite given him by a few days of unaccountable delay. Miss Ashly neither came nor wrote to countermand her engaged apartments. Sitting over his coffee, one morning, however, and giving reins to his sensitive imagination—wondering whether the eccen-

tric lady might not have flitted rapidly through, on a sudden return to England, or started to refresh her content with single blessedness by a visit to the Orient and Lady Hester Stanhope—perhaps taken ill with the malaria at Rome, perhaps gone into a convent, perhaps attacked by the banditti in the mountains—Paul was relieved of his uncertainty by a fresh surprise. The servant whom he had sent to the post, returned with the following letter from her:—

ROME, —, —.

MY DEAR MR. FANE:

I presume it will somewhat startle you to see the signature to this letter—(“Winifred *Tetherly*,” if, before arriving at the bottom of the page where I am to write it, I do not first awake from a dream)—though, for what is but a prompt following of your advice, you have no very reasonable ground for surprise. To help a lady to a husband you will think, is as easy as to pass the salt—so easy, and for one who thought herself the most difficult woman in the world, that I am not yet fully persuaded of it myself. But I must at least, tell you the story of an event which (according to my present strong impression and belief), has prevented me from keeping my appointment with you as Miss Ashly.

I may confess to having felt somewhat offended at your proposal of Mr. *Tetherly* to me, in your reply to my first letter. It was partly a disparagement of yourself to think another could take your place so easily, but it was still more an unflattering comment on my readiness for a lover. When his card was brought to me with your note of introduction, ten days ago, I presumed there was a

complete understanding between you, and I should have declined receiving his visit altogether, but that I was not willing to betray that I had taken offence.

With the discovery (which I made almost immediately) that you had not only kept my secret, but had breathed nothing to him of your own foreshadowing of his destiny, Mr. Tetherly, of course, was put upon the ground of a simply well introduced new acquaintance. And I did not, at first, particularly fancy him. His features and bearing struck me as not being of a very patrician cast, and his voice seemed to lack the indefinable semitone which forms the cadence of high-breeding. Then he was not distinguished for anything—a proud woman's strongest objection to a man. My faith in the hidden qualities of any character with which you have exchanged a friendship, alone kept my judgment suspended after this first unfavorable impression.

You know how full Rome is of common idling ground. We met at the Coliseum—we met at the galleries and studios—we met in St. Peter's wildernesses of aisles and chapels—always accidentally, I thought. There was a certain pleasure, which I did not analyze at first, in what there was of you in his mere presence—having come from you so recently—and I looked into his eyes as he talked, with the interest I should feel in a mirror that had just reflected you. And so began, not my liking of him, but my understanding of him; for I found that he saw with your peculiar eyes, and thought and felt with (how shall I describe it?) your peculiar religion of appreciation. There was in his sincere deference—his sweet and hallowing reverence of look and tone—a something better and nobler than the stamp of high-breeding which I had missed—the unsandalled feet, as it were, which my artificial eyes had found so bare, being but the acknowledgment of holy

ground. It is so sweeter than all the flattery to a woman to be approached as sacred! And in his earnest seriousness of attention, and the subdued and unwavering completeness of his belief in me, and worship of the heart I had to bestow, there was a persuasion against which my pride-barriers were weak. I began to listen to him as I thought I should never listen to mortal voice again.

This was ten days ago, and I am now—married! Time, I believe, is of all degrees of compressibility—"a year in a day," common, at least, in the almanac of the heart. I feel as if I had known Mr. Tetherly from the time when I might have known him—the time when we might have loved—if we had met, that is to say, with the removal of our masks by your magician's wand. He would never have seen my heart but by your pencil's portrayal of it, I am very sure. His own would have been certainly misinterpreted by me but for your reading of it. And, even as it was, I should not have been "in tune" for loving him, I fear, but that I had played the symphony to you!

We have married suddenly. It was not merely because neither of us had any time to waste (as the world will say), but there might have been difficulties if it had not been put at once past interference by relatives and friends. And this brings me to a request I have to make of your kindness. My niece is with the Palefords. Will you announce my marriage to her, and with your own estimate of my husband? The habits of reserve in our family would prevent me from making any explanation of what they were not prepared to appreciate. You have doubtless, by this time, brought your magnetism of influence to bear upon Mildred, and she will take, from you, the opinion of Mr. Tetherly which, it is very necessary, should await us at home. As the coolnesses in our Ashly blood are life-long, you may thus do the family a timely service, the value of

which, to those who are living, could, I think, scarcely be over-rated.

But, ah! if the magnetism you are thus to exercise over my niece could be warmed into love! If Mildred (who has never yet felt a tenderness for mortal man, I believe) could feel the wave of your magician's wand, and, while endeared to you by being under your spell, win you to add one more flower—yourself—to our family tree! Tetherly tells me it is a childish attachment which at present binds you, and which, he thinks, will not end in marriage. Mildred has a heart's current, strong and warm, beneath her surface of ice. Will you not look at her with your discerning and tender eyes? The citadel I thus propose for your conquest is proud and strong, I know. For any passing knight-errant, with a stranger's crest and plume, it would be hopelessly impregnable. But you have a friend within the gates—a shield you have already pierced hanging broken in Ashly hall! Mildred would be half your captive, even when sounding her first defiance.

My pen was just lifted to erase these few sentences last written. What I am thus proposing to you—like what I have proposed to you before—is against all rules of love in books, as it is most signally against all my previous nurture and instincts. I simply know that I am still natural and true—though, like the butterfly, on his new wings, with only his memory as a worm, I am surprised that the air should sustain me.

Yet why should I not own that I have loved you? Why may I not desire, since I could not have your love, to have your life passed near me, with the love left out? For that much of a mind and heart that is made one's own by wedlock is but a small part of what was loved in the lover—hardly lessening what is to be lived with in the friend. The heaven where they “neither marry nor are given

in marriage"—intercourse with the completeness of which, mind and soul are quite content—may be foreshadowed in this world. What I might daily and freely share, were you married to one of my kindred—your looks, your thoughts, your words, your presence, your genius, with all its gifts of insight and appreciation—would be making you bountifully mine! And with Tetherly's partaking, too; for he loves you—that much—as well as I.

We shall follow close upon this letter to Florence, and you will please retain for me, therefore, the apartments already engaged. The remaining sittings for my portrait can thus be taken with the same light. (Shall I look to you the same?) Mildred is to sit to you there, also, I understand. And of course you will see the need of immediateness in your announcement of my marriage to her. It will be a carefully woven woof of tact and kindness, I well know—but will you not broider upon it, also, a flower for yourself?"

"Ah, what a letter this is—from me to any man! I could not write so to Tetherly—quite yet! But, my dear Mr. Fane, the grating of my heart's long-locked convent cell let you in like the sunshine. Though my veil is just thrown aside that I may come out, you are less a stranger than the open day which meets me at the door.

May God bless you—whether you are to be the light of our dark Ashly eyes or not!

Yours most truly,

WINIFRED TETHERLY.

It was fortunate for Paul that immediate and comparatively simple action (the visit to Casa G——) was his first duty after the reading of this letter. He was

not ready, either with nerves or opinions, to think of all it called upon him to realize. He mechanically went about his preparations for a day in the country, with the Palefords. And in another hour, he was whirling over the bridge of the Arno, the once-more strangely thoughtful and silent passenger in the vetturino of his friend Giuseppe.



CHAPTER XXX.

ANY secret embarrassment that there might have been, in the meeting of Paul with the bride and bridegroom, was quite overlaid by the grateful pleasure with which they acknowledged the success of his delicate mission to Casa G——. Tetherly had been made fully aware of the importance of it, and it was a new tie between him and his friend; for the possibility of a cold reception by the most influential member of the family into which he had married, had been the phantom of unrest to his honeymoon, thus far—his particularly sensitive nature dreading nothing so much as the position of a just tolerated intruder. In spite, however, of interested reasons why there would have been objections to Miss Winifred's marrying at all, and in spite of the bridegroom's disadvantages of family and posi-

tion, the meeting with Miss Mildred, on their arrival in Florence, was every way cordial and satisfactory. The truth was, that Paul had touched the secret spring of family pride with which he had confidentially been made acquainted by the niece herself, dwelling mainly on the perfection of manly proportion, in Tetherly's person, and on his rare loftiness of nature as to all qualities that contribute most to form the inborn nobleman.

The finishing of the portrait of the bride was now a pleasant side-current of occupation; and the deferred sitting of Miss Ashly, at her aunt's apartments, followed in due course, as previously arranged. But this latter part of his artistic engagement was, in more than one way, a critical trial of Paul's self-control. The footing of distance and ceremony on which he now stood with Miss Mildred was very difficult to harmonize with the confiding intimacy of the Tetherlys, and still more with the influence of Miss Paleford's presence, she coming to town most commonly with her friend. The watchful discrimination necessary to suit his words and manner to such varied degrees of intimacy, promised at first to be fatal altogether, to that concentration of thought so important to the success of his pencil. Between his genius, too, and his feeling toward Miss Ashly, there was a struggle as to the phase of character which that picture was to portray. In fact, after the first sitting, he found it indispensable that there should

be some other object of attention than himself in the room—something to scatter the focus of all eyes and thoughts bent upon his work—and it occurred to him, at last, that the presence of his friend Bosh might serve this purpose. It was not uncommon for two artists to make drawings from the same subject; and, on Paul's requesting the privilege—as a favor to a brother student in whom he was interested, and who was to profit especially by the comparison thus made instructive between his own work and his friend's—the ladies at once assented.

As a fresh drop of oil upon Bosh's sorest annoyance, this was incidentally useful. He required soothing, from time to time, upon the point of Paul's having friends and acquaintances who were not also his own. The presence of Mary Evenden, lately, in the studio of "Signor Valerio," had been also a conciliatory advantage; for, with the atmosphere of sainted purity which the presence of this fair creature threw over the room, the jealous artist was safely introduced to the model-bust of his lady-love, without taking offence. And the knowledge that it was the work of a female hand (of "Signor Valerio," a lady in disguise) was so certified to Bosh by Mary's familiarity with the place, that he was less reluctant to forego a presentation to the princess herself, which, though it would have better pleased his dignity, might have been an objectionable intrusion upon her highness's privacy of pursuit.

With his easel in the rear of Paul's, at somewhat a different angle of light, but getting pretty much the same view, Bosh went industriously to work, on the morning of the second sitting. There was great relief, both in the amusing study which he himself afforded to the ladies, and in the interest of the two pictures. But Paul soon began to discover that he was to draw an unforeseen advantage from the twin portraiture. Blivins was a literal artist, as to expression. He had neither imagination nor penetration into character. While he flattered the complexion and features, therefore, as far as was any way reasonable, he told the most uncompromising truth as to the superficial impression. It was how his sitter looked, to people in general. Of course, between his likeness and Paul's there was all the difference of a lady painted with a mask or without one.

Miss Ashly came round, from time to time, and informed herself of the progress of the artists. But her manner softened very perceptibly to Paul, as she saw the more generous and nobler depths of her nature coming out under his pencil. With a constant and self-denying effort, he remembered her as she had looked when speaking to him of Sybil Paleford; and, while he consulted her present face for its lines and shadows, he drew only upon the countenance in his memory for its language and meaning. To the two artists, she was evidently as

different a creature as could well be imagined; but, in feeling provokingly conscious of the fidelity of Mr. Blivins's likeness, she was far more conscious of the truth of Mr. Fane's. Her heart told her that he had profoundly read what was written on its inmost page; and, by this proof of his superiority of genius to what constituted a literal copyist, like the other artist, she now understood by what spell he had so controlled her. And, that the same spell—rejected as it had been for a while—was now resuming its power over her, Paul saw with an inexpressible soothing of his pride.

Another subject, however, of far deeper interest than either Paul or the two portraits of herself, began to engross the attention of Miss Ashly. The different persons who were present at these artistic *matinées*, were not collectively aware how curiously each had some secret reason for affectionate familiarity and intimacy with Paul. In every heart (except Miss Mildred's own) he had a hidden niche of grateful attachment—giving, in spite of all the commonplace-ness of well-bred gossip, a deeper tone to the words and manner with which he was occasionally addressed. Her aunt's confidingness of look and voice, in conversing with him, was simply an inexplicable wonder to the observing niece. But all this might still have been left to pass in silent surprise, as merely another exercise of what she had herself experienced of Mr. Fane's power of

magnetism, but for the atmosphere of unreserve which it created, and in which the unguarded nature of Sybil Paleford expanded with unmistrusting simplicity. "The unvoiced persuasion to show her heart," such as the flower feels in the air of spring, was in the manner of all around her.

It was on the last day of the sittings, and the portrait of Miss Mildred was finished, to all eyes but the artist's. The approaching conclusion to what had so pleasantly drawn them together, morning after morning, was regretted by all; and to the manner of all, except one, it had given a softer shade of thoughtfulness and sentiment. With each succeeding day, to Miss Ashly, the unconscious betrayal of Sybil's feelings towards Paul had become clearer; and, with the kindly softening of the general key-note of conversation, there was an outrunning sympathy, in the frank girl's face and tone, which brought the long-resisted suspicion almost to the full.

The effect which this unpleasantly increasing conviction was producing on his subject, as she sat, grew embarrassing to Paul's pencil, however. He was coming to the last touch or two which should set the confirming seal and cipher on the character of the expression. For this critical point, more than for all the labor that had gone before, he required that the face before him should be his copy. But how different was it now, even from the countenance

which had been literally transferred to the canvas of his friend Blivins! In the eye there was a more stony hardness of concealment—in the nostril a scarce perceptible line of more resentful inflation—and in the haughty lip a curl of indomitable pride wholly unmistakable! To modify or ignore characteristics so decided, seemed to have grown suddenly absurd. The drawing scarce looked any longer to be a likeness.

With his pencil wavering in the twirl of his fingers, and his power of abstraction fast yielding to the more forcible character of what he saw, Paul thought he would make a last trial to forget the face before him, and recall, for a finishing touch, the memory of its expression which he had once treasured away. It cost a struggle, and he became, for a moment, disregarding of all but his inner thought. There was a slight wave of his hand, intended, half-consciously, as a courteous intimation to his sitter that she need no longer keep her chair; and he then stepped quickly back and seated himself, and, with the effort to rally his recollection, pressed his hand before his eyes.

But, to the watchful and beautiful mourner who had seen his strength fail him, but a few days before, and who had still, secretly, a tender care and remembrance of him as an invalid, this sudden change of posture and the pressure of the fingers on the eyelids, were signs of illness.

“Dear Paul!” she murmured, in sounds that just escaped

her lips, as she rushed with one bound across the room, and clasped his head in her hands.

But, though the instant rise of Paul to his feet made her mistake apparent, and there was a laugh of familiar amusement among the less attentive company, the two expressive words so indistinctly uttered had not escaped the ear of Miss Ashly. Nor had the single instant's exchange of looks between the two, as they stood together by the easel, escaped her eye. It was a half-playful assurance of Sybil's that such would be the loving earnestness with which, if he were indeed ill or sad, she would forget the whole world to spring to his side ; it was an acknowledgment of Paul's, that, with all his heart, for that moment at least, he gratefully and fondly worshipped her.

There was an instant's parting and closing of the tightly compressed lips of Miss Ashly, seen by Paul with a chance turn of his head, at the next moment—the smothered utterance of an outburst of impatient pride—but, though wholly inaudible to all around, it was, to his sharpened perception, as clear as if the vibration of air had written it on the wall—the gasping admission that she knew, at last, that Sybil loved him !

The game of cross-purposes of which Paul's life seemed to be a most obstinately tangled example, was still played

on, in the few following days, and with a somewhat trying, but more quiet variation.

With the finishing of the portraits for his friends, and the success with which his genius for Art was now undeniably stamped, the responsibility of the son to his mother, as well as to himself, made its call upon him. He felt that it was time to relieve her of the burden of his support—that, with the timely seizure of opportunity, his ambition demanded that he should commence his profession now. There seemed to be both reasons and facilities for his trying his wings first in Europe—deferring the return to his own country for a couple of years, or till his views of Art had become correctly and definitely confirmed—but, in the question of where the scene of his first efforts should be, or in what city he should first open his studio as a portrait-painter, he found that his heart must have a share. Sybil Paleford—it must be with reference to her that this movement must be decided upon! To be near her, or far from her—there was indeed a problem of happiness to be solved by that! Prompt and uncompromising with himself as Paul was, in his decisions for his own welfare only, there was a few-days' struggle on this subject, which was, for a while, of very doubtful termination. Before giving the result to the reader, let us follow another thread that was weaving, little regarded by him, at the same time.

The Tetherlys, since their arrival in Florence, had been

occupied very fully with receiving the hospitalities extended to them as bride and bridegroom ; but they seemed to have but one mind as to the necessity of seeing Paul at their table, at least once a day. He was very certain to pass the evening with them, in company ; but if they were not to meet at dinner, he must breakfast with them—Miss Mildred most commonly being one of the party. By the pressure of the bride's engagements, too, or by some apparent accident, it oftenest happened that the niece, after dinner or breakfast, was left to Paul's attentions exclusively, and a daily *tête-à-tête* for an hour or two, seemed, somehow, curiously certain to come to pass.

As will be easily understood, Paul had only a portion of a mind to give to Miss Ashly, with the struggle of his tenderer interests going on beneath the surface—his companionship, of course, amounting merely to an exercise of the habitual civility of his manners, with the instinctive earnestness of sincerity, and willingness to be impressed, which formed the language of his nature. In proportion to his reticacy and apparent willingness to withdraw from any intricate reciprocation of thought or feeling, however, his proud companion seemed to relax her reserve, and grow kindly and genial. Paul became aware, without reasoning upon it, at first, that his footing in Miss Ashly's regard and confidence, grew daily more assured and agreeable. But, while the growing discovery still reached the

hidden weakness at the bottom of his heart, it was, for the time, at least, of very secondary interest. He hardly realized it enough in fact, even to connect it with the recollection of the good-natured proposal in Mrs. Tetherly's letter—the thought of playing the lover to Miss Ashly having been dismissed with a smile; but still, her aunt having undoubtedly followed up her own wish at present, by the exercise of secret influence in his favor.

It was a sunset with the promise of a coming spring in its softness and warmth, and Paul sat with Miss Mildred in the balconied window looking down upon the Arno. Mrs. Tetherly, with whom they had dined, had pleaded an engagement and taken her carriage to be gone for an hour; Tetherly had strolled over to the English Embassy for his daily gossip upon news and politics; and the two younger guests were once more *tête-à-tête*, without any particular willingness or contrivance of their own.

An inquiry after Miss Paleford, who had not accompanied her friend to town that day, very naturally suggested another question as to Mr. Arthur Ashly—a letter announcing his intended speedy return to Florence having been received a few days before.

And, *apropos* of Sybil and my brother, Mr. Fane," said Miss Ashly, in whose mind the mention of these two together seemed to break down suddenly a barrier of reserve, "I was silly enough not to remember, when I once sought your

influence for the prospering of Arthur's passion, that so lovely a girl was most probably, also, a preference of your own."

"I gave you proof, I believe," said Paul, with a smile, that my interest in his behalf was quite sincere."

"True—your admirable portrait of him," she replied, in a tone and with a look of apology, "but what is the work of the pencil—most eloquent plea, as yours certainly was, in a rival's favor—when the painter follows it up by outrivalling the picture?"

"I had no thought of doing so at the time," said Paul, "allowing for the sake of argument, that your supposition is correct. Mr. Ashly was absent, however, when his portrait and I came into competition. Possibly, in a rivalry with his more persuasive and living presence, the result might have had less the appearance of being in my favor."

Miss Ashly started, and gave Paul a quick and penetrating look. The possibility he suggested seemed a new thought to her, but she was doubtful of the willingness for that different result which his words seemed to imply.

"You will pardon me, if I do you injustice," she said presently, with an effort at frankness, which he saw cost all the self-mastery she possessed, "but I did not think you—I do not think any human being in fact—capable of disinterestedness toward a rival in love. To be frank with you, I have talked this over with Colonel Paleford—differing

from him somewhat. He thought you sincere in your furtherance of my brother's suit; though I believe, he has been a little staggered in his belief of it—or rather the probability of it—by since becoming aware of Sybil's own interest in the matter. For—pardon me!—do you not *know* that she loves you, Mr. Fane?"

"Allow me to alter your question a little," said Paul, "by the addition of the probability in your brother's favor which I have just suggested :—Would Miss Paleford love Mr. Fane—(a confession she has never yet framed into words, I give you my honor!)—if Mr. Ashly had fairly tried the winning of her, with the field to himself?"

The proud sister rose to her feet, and took one turn across the room. The intensity of interest for her brother, and for the cause on which she had so set her heart, was, evidently, for the moment, less powerful than the haughty refusal of soul to even accept what must be thus significantly yielded. "From him!" "From an artist!" looked her fierce eyes, as she turned away.

But there was a change, like the sky's clearness after the passing of a thunder-cloud, in the smile with which she returned. The hidden qualities of heart that Paul had seen down to, and brought to the surface, in his portrait of her, had surged uppermost, and were now shining brightly through her features. He had said little—he had offered nothing—but the whole book of his inner nature, and of

his feeling as to the subject before them, was read by her at a glance.

"Inexpressibly generous to grant," she said, taking his hand with a warm grasp in both her own, "but I will ask it of you!"

With a silent and respectful pressure of his lips to the slight fingers drawn with such nervous closeness to his own, Paul placed in her hand a letter which he already held prepared.

"Here," he said, "is what I have written on this very subject to Colonel Paleford. For the last few days it has been my one thought, sleeping and waking—with how much of trial and effort, I need not say—but it is done! I was to send it to him to-morrow, and it was written for his eyes only; but our conversation has made me willing that you should first read it, and you will, perhaps, take it to him to-night, on your return. Let me leave it with you!"

Paul bowed, and lifted once more to his lips the hand he held, and in another moment was alone in the street—alone in the whole world, it seemed to him—with his overcrowded heart.

And, coming close to the balconied window, where she could see by the lessening twilight, Miss Ashly read as follows:

FLORENCE, —, —.

MY DEAR COLONEL:

When I once before had occasion to trouble you with a letter, it was (if you remember) to explain my waiving of a happiness to which I had properly no claim—a place at court, of which your daughter generously supposed that I might do the honors. A false position of a still more delicate nature is my embarrassment, at present—a much higher happiness, and accorded to me also by the noble generosity of your family—and to waive this also, as unquestionably and entirely, would, perhaps, be my simple duty in now writing to you. But there is a presumptuous qualification of this second disclaimer, upon which I believe I must venture, though I do so by placing myself and the consequences entirely in your hands.

The enclosed most sacred letter, which I received from the mother-angel of your household, just before she was lost to your sight, will explain to you, at least, what may be too credulous an estimate of my responsibility to her child. Mrs. Paleford, with her kind and unworldly eyes, looked upon me as one with whom she could entrust the life and happiness most precious to her—(may God make me worthy of so hallowing a belief in my truth and goodness!)—and she even encouraged me to feel that there might be already awakened for me, in the heart of her daughter, an unconfessed preference. That this gives me the privilege to say to you what I might not else find the courage to say—that I love the wondrously beautiful and pure creature of whom it speaks with my whole heart—will be a pride to remember, though it may be a love that would not otherwise find a voice.

But, though I have never spoken of love to your daughter, and

she has never spoken of it to me, you will pardon me if I offer some reasonable introduction for the proposition I have to make, by suggesting—(thus, to you only)—the possibility that capricious Nature *may* have made this unambitious disposal of her heart! The lover's eyes are full of hope, and you will understand me, therefore, with the proper allowance and with your ever-courteous indulgence, when I declare my belief that Miss Sybil is not indifferent to me. I believe it upon the sweet evidence which, to a lover, is more precious than words.

The return of Mr. Ashly to Florence, expected daily, is, however, the renewal of addresses more worthy of her, I need not be at the trouble to confess. The outside reasons for a preference of this gentleman—fortune, position, birth, and family intimacy—are very powerful; and, were her character any other than the wonder of unsunned freshness of peculiarity that it is, I should simply leave to another the prize that was not for my approaching. But Miss Sybil is one of those rare women who wear the humblest flower where the costliest gem would be denied a place. It is possible, as I have given you my ground for believing, that I may be more loved than Mr. Ashly—just possible (I quote her mother's belief in supposing) that the devotion of my life to her happiness may be more welcome than his.

But Mr. Ashly has not yet had a fair trial, either of his qualities or his powers of pleasing. Opportunity, indeed, has been so much in my own favor, thus far, that the preference over him, even if it were not ungenerous in me to claim it, would be an unwise haste toward your daughter. He has a noble and deep character, hidden under a mask of pride and incommunicativeness. I have endeavored to show, in my portrait of him, what I am very sure that more intimacy would develop. Miss Paleford

should, at least, know truly the value of what she has the free choice to refuse or make her own.

You will have anticipated what I wish to say, my dear friend ! With Mr. Ashly's arrival, I shall take my departure from Florence. It is the time for the entrance upon my profession, and the reason for a change of place will seem natural to your daughter. I leave to your courtesy and kindness, entirely, the making of my adieus to her—knowing, of course, that you will so shape them that I shall seem neither neglectful of her, nor forgetful of the hospitality of your home. I shall go to England, I think—my views of Art seeming most suited to the taste of your countrymen—and I shall pass a year or two, probably, in that country, before returning to my own. But I will keep you advised of my movements. My life—and you know precisely what it is to be, with my profession and nothing more—shall be kept ready, at your call (and a year or two will decide it), either to take up its bitter task of forgetfulness, or to be made blest with the love which I may, meantime, dream of. With no more farewell than this, but with inexpressible thanks for all your friendship has been to me, I thus abruptly take my leave.

May God bless you and your peerless daughter, my dear colonel, and pray believe me, ever yours most gratefully and devotedly,

PAUL FANE.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WITH the next day's arrangements for departure from Florence, Paul found that his leave-takings of intimate friends were to be less general than he had anticipated. The Tetherlys at once concluded to bear him company on his journey. Blivins, in a week or two, was to follow the Firkin family to France, where his marriage to Miss Sophia was to take place. With the season a little more advanced, the Princess C—— proposed to change her studio to Paris, where she might have all the facilities of Art, and, at the same time, be within reach of the society of London and the French capital. And Mary Evenden hoped, there, to resume her studies with "Signor Valerio," as Mrs. Cleverly, after a short trip to Rome and Naples, was to join the rest of the gay world, in centering, for the first months of summer, near the Tuileries and St. James's.

Miss Ashly came to town to be present at the departure of the Tetherlys, and she was the bearer of a letter to Paul

from Colonel Paleford. She had evidently relied upon an opportunity to speak to him alone for a moment, probably to acknowledge, in words, the accordance of her feelings with the communication to Sybil's father, which she had been permitted to read; but Paul's heart was too full of all that made up his farewell to Florence, that morning, and he carefully avoided the *tête-à-tête*, entrenching himself within the forms of kindly ceremony and politeness. He took the letter she had brought for himself, as she stood at the carriage-door, at the last moment, and it was not till the first stoppage, at a secluded *albergo* in the mountains, that he stole away to a lonely spot, under the trees, and had the courage to break the seal. The colonel thus wrote:

CASA G——, ——.

MY DEAR FANE:

Your letter was so in accordance with what had already passed between us, that I was not surprised at its tone and contents. There was a startling unlikeness, in it, to the common language of lovers, as well as to the common usage of the world, but we were prepared for its delicate generosity, by knowing the standard up to which you live. Allow me to begin by thanking you, frankly, and with all my heart, for the fresh proof of it which touches me so nearly—adding, however (though the explanation is scarce necessary), that, if it were a question of my own happiness only, I should not accept so unreservedly this sacrifice of yourself. For my daughter, I must be even less magnanimous toward a friend

than were else possible. I am sure you will understand how much harder this proof of affection is than the other extreme.

But will you allow me to say, also, my dear Fane, that I love my daughter too well to be *worldly* in my anxiety for her welfare? You will hardly believe, perhaps, that the sacred letter, which you enclosed to me, was, in its impulse and purpose, the echo to my own heart's most earnest prayer—varied but by the different view of the same blessing and the road to reach it, as seen by sadder, and perhaps wiser eyes. Mrs. Paleford (may God soften to me her irreparable loss!) looked into her own conscious heart for her daughter's image. She thought her what she felt herself to be—that, and that only. And, were it so, I ask to be believed when I say, that, as the father of Sybil, I would now sign, and send to you again, her mother's precious letter of blessing and bestowal.

While, however, as there is little need to say, I think you abundantly worthy of my daughter, and the future career and destiny, whatever it may be, which is toned and guided by qualities like yours, abundantly worthy of her sharing, I must still think (you will pardon me for insisting) that your mode of life and your tastes are not those in which she is likeliest to find happiness. That she loves you, at present, I have very little doubt. Your departure from Florence will leave a dark cloud on her heart. But it is the love of a child, and of instinct; and it is for your exterior of graces and genial courtesy. She has not reasoned upon it. She loves you for the least of what constitutes your character—the least of what your life is to develop. With the first choice of the many different doors, that open away from the common vestibule of youth, your paths would divide. *You* will close all behind you, on your way to that inner sanctuary where burns only the lamp of genius—*she* will turn rather where the lofty dome lets in

the splendors of sunshine. For *your* concentration, it must be the dim silence of a cell—for *her* joyousness of expansion, it must be the music unimprisoned but by the columns of a palace.

A wife, my dear Fane, must live in the same world as her husband to be happy with him; and it is from the difficulty of this, that the wives of men of genius are seldom happy. Sybil has neither a predominant imagination nor a natural love of seclusion; and while, therefore, if she had these essential qualities, she could be blest only by such a husband as yourself, she is wholly unsuited to you, wanting these. Then, guardedly as her tastes and habits have been kept simple, by her education and by my limited means, she is innately luxurious and prodigal. She feels, as she looks, a queen—with no instinctive sense, apparently, that there can be any propriety of limit to her possession of what naturally befits her. Capable of sacrificing her life for you, therefore, at any crisis that could call upon her devotion, she would unconsciously sacrifice yours by slow degrees, where the call was made only on her economy.

You will have seen, by this, why I differed from the sacred thought which prompted Mrs. Paleford's letter to you, and why I still give my preference to your wealthier and less gifted rival. Mr. Ashly's sphere of life is Sybil's own natural and befitting sphere, and, in all that forms his pride and his daily occupation and enjoyment, she can fully and freely share. His character you know, for you have studied and most skillfully represented it, in its best light, with your pencil. The only problem is the result of the experiment you have so generously given us the opportunity to try—dependent, after all, on that most willful of capricious things, a woman's heart. If Sybil has conceived a life-long passion for you (as is very possible), and if Mr. Ashly fails, consequently, to

supplant you in your absence, I will gladly send you the welcome which my own heart yearns already to give you. To me, as you must know, you would be far the more agreeable of the two, as son, friend, and companion. We are both leaving ourselves out of the question, however—you, thank God, as well as I—and the happiness of my beautiful Sybil is the sacred chalice to be held high by our united hands till its place is chosen. God bless you for your nobleness to her, and for your truth of friendship to me; and believe me, my dear Fane, always faithfully yours,

BASIL PALEFORD.

The travelling carriage resumed its way, after the noon halt in the mountains; and Paul, with the secret contained in the foregoing letter to be kept from the Tetherlys, was an absent-minded companion on that journey. They had silent sympathies in common, however, and the scenery and the incidents of the road gave them topics enough, when, to invent conversation would have been difficult. And so, with the lapse of days that were to Paul like an unrealized dream, they arrived duly in Paris.

With the proceeding thence, after a short stay, to London, and with Paul's establishment there, and his first professional year, the reader is not to be troubled. It was a broken interval in the thread of our story. The letters and introductions of the young artist were more than sufficient for his wants, and it was the usual course of things in a career whose flattering outset is made easy by kind-

ness. With the intention to tell only that portion of his history which were else untold, we pass over this period therefore, and, in our next chapter, take up the broken thread farther on.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SOME eighteen months after Paul's arrival in London, he sat one morning among his pencils. He was not very well disposed for work, but it was at least a lesser evil, for he shrank from being left alone with his own thoughts. The copy that he was making of his former portrait of Mrs. Tetherly, was to be one in the collection of his drawings which was to grace the *boudoir* of the bride—his friend Colonel Paleford's daughter Sybil, having been married, a month before, to Mr. Arthur Ashly, and this preparatory addition to her new home in England having been among her wishes expressed when first affianced.

The copy was nearly finished ; but, to give an improving touch to it, Paul had requested a sitting from his friend, the original, her face having very much softened and genialized with the union which had proved to her so happy. The artist's continued and close intimacy with the Tetherlys, had enabled him to watch well the development

of her expression ; for, though residing mostly at their home in the country, they were often in London, and never without passing a part of every day with him who had brought them together. Arriving in town the previous evening, after an unusually long absence, Mrs. Tetherly had sent word that she would be early at the studio, for the renewed sitting which Paul had written to request ; and he now waited her coming.

But, pencils were reluctant, with the heart far away ; and, leaving his copy, Paul went to his desk—remembering a still unread letter of some interest, which had been given to him for his perusal, and, in the press of other matter forgotten. An American family, on their first foreign tour, had recently come to him with a note of introduction from his friend Bosh ; and, by the eldest daughter, Miss Katherine Kumletts, he had been indulged with a sight of her friend 'Phia Firkin's correspondence while abroad—this last unread letter being at the time mislaid, but afterwards found and handed to Paul, while he was showing his new friends the wonders of the Zoölogical Gardens. It was written by the present Mrs. Blivins, shortly after her marriage, and dated at Paris where the ceremony took place:—

DEAREST KITTY :

I date once more from Paris, though, in your last, you say I should have signed myself, “ your affectionate snail,” so slow am

I at crawling towards home. Please have some hopes, of me, however, as I am, at present, a *bivalve*, and, of course, with new laws of motion—flattened into this new character (I liked to have forgot to tell you) on the first of May, by the Rev. Mr. Sprinkle, of the English chapel—my beloved Wabash being the other shell, and connubial bliss, of course, the mutual oyster between us.

Yes, Kitty, I AM MARRIED—I believe. It is hard to realize, particularly with only the same sized pen in one's quite unaltered fingers. Things look very little different, my dear! I don't open my eyes any wider, that I know of. Just as much salt and pepper to make things taste nice, and no less sugar in my tea, I give you my honor! But the servants say, "Madam" to me, and mamma has stopped keeping such a bright look-out. So I suppose I am either more or better than I used to be. Though Kitty (by the way), what is the arithmetic of thinking *more* of yourself for becoming a *half*? Your faithful 'Phia was a "*whole* souled girl," I believe you always said, yet, as papa would express it, I am only the "*fifty per cent.*" of my devoted Bosh, since I am married to him. Just cipher me that little sum, dear!

There is not much to tell you about the ceremony. I knew very well what it was to be, but, somehow one can't help expecting the astonishing minute—a sort of dropping away of some platform from under one, as it were, when the fatal knot is fastened. I had my handkerchief already to cry, and could only blow my nose with the poor disappointed thing! I really think there should be a bit of ice dropped down one's back, or a shower-bath, or a pin stuck into one, by the bridesmaid, or something to bring the nerves to a climax. It looks hard-hearted to take it quite so easy—now, don't it?

The groomsman, I should have mentioned to you, was Mr.

Fane—come all the way from London to officiate at his friend Blivins's wedding. He looked paler than I had ever seen him; and as my Wabash looked considerably redder, the contrast was even more striking than usual. In fact, the glow of happiness is the least becoming complexion to a man, I have generally observed. And Mr. Fane did everything so beautifully! Ah, Kitty! there are men one has no idea of marrying, who are still very pleasing to contemplate!

Now, I know very well what you are saying! I might have had the pale cheek to kiss, instead of the red one, you think—or, as brother 'Phus, with his tandem, would express himself, I might have put the wheel-horse on the lead. You are mistaken, my dear! for, in the first place, I couldn't, and, in the next place, I wouldn't if I could. For me to have set my cap for Mr. Fane (as I once wrote to you I had some thought of doing)—la! Kitty! it would be like a clam's having a passion for a bull-frog. We should never sing the same tune, and then he would be jumping out of my reach every minute. You should have put your two sharp eyes upon Mr. Fane to understand it, for it is not because he is a bit grander than other people. I think, indeed, that my Wabash (with the present addition to his daily bread, at least) feels "some punkins" above him. Then he is so quiet and deferential that you feel quite as tall, if not taller, when he is done looking at you. But, still, after talking with him a little, I always have a strange consciousness that he has come out of some inner world to speak to me—a feeling, somehow, as if he was to return to his unseen parlor friends, when he has done talking with me in the entry. Very pleasant, for a change, to see such a man, my dear, but who could tie her nightcap quite at ease in his wonderful company?

No, no, Kitty!—never give all your money for half the article!

Blivins is all mine, from the bald bump of reverence that makes the top of his head look like the lid of the old coffee-pot at school, down to his great toe, that I could dress up and make a baby of, if I wanted a plaything, this very minute. He believes in me too, with all there is of him, and it is a comfort to know that one's worshipper has no spare faith in want of another altar. I expect to settle down into a very plain case of happiness, when I get home, and I want a husband (as they say when they advertise for a doctor's horse) "warranted to stand without hitching."

I know a little more of Mr. Fane than what I have just told you, however. Blivins gets very eloquent (and it is the greatest pleasure to me, in matrimony, thus far, that the dear fellow lies awake at night and tells me all his secrets)—very eloquent, indeed, in talking of a certain romantic attachment of his friend Paul's. He (Blivins, you understand) quite frightens me—the way he sits up in bed and bangs his hand down on the counterpane, declaring they will yet be married! But I have an opinion of my own, for I overheard a conversation between Mary Evenden (the girl he refers to) and "Signor Valerio" (the lady in disguise, who took my bust), on this very subject. They were both so occupied in copying those perfections of mine, which have no ears, that they forgot I could hear also, I suppose; but, at any rate, they talked as freely as if I and the two clay models of me were deaf and blind alike. And what do you think this pretty Miss Mary insisted upon? Why, that she loved Mr. Fane's genius, but wished some one else to have the rest of him! This double idea of the same gentleman explained to me the feeling I had, as to his belonging to some other world—but how funny, if she has him in *that* world, she shouldn't want him in *this* one, too! The fact is, I suppose, that he and his genius amount to two individuals, and the innocent

little thing dreads polygamy; but, for my part, if I were to run the risk of such a dreadful crime at all, I should at least take the live man, in his visible shoes and stockings, to begin with. If his invisible genius chose to mouse round, to be loved a little, now and then (say it was Blivins), I don't believe the two Blivinses need interfere, and I'll warrant I could find what extra affection would be necessary, without robbing anybody. What says your instinct on that subject, my dear Kitty?

One little query, by the way, before I bite my lips to stop thinking of Mr. Fane: Might I not have woke up, some morning (supposing I had married the visible Paul No. 1), and found myself grown intellectual enough to belong to his other world, so as to feel quite at home with the invisible Paul No. 2? And might not Miss Evenden, in the same way, marry No. 2, and wake up some morning and find herself just as much at home with No. 1? I give you the subject to write a composition upon, my dear! "Please mind your stops, and write it legibly!"

We turn our faces homeward next week. I shall be glad to smell republican air once more. This is not the side of the water where a woman is thought much of, "free gratis for nothing;" and, in fact, unless you want *his* particular love made to you, a man over here has no very remarkable pleasure in your society. Give me the American beaux, who value the women they have "taken no stock in" as high as they do their own investments. I think I shall be content with a one-horse life and Blivins—though I have been a whole team, you may say, ever since we left school. I begin to feel less universally inclined, my dear! Prairie-loving is all very well for awhile, but one's heart aches, after all, for something with a fence round it. And Blivins, as somebody in Shakespeare says of his very plain dog, is "a poor thing but mine own."

Good-bye, dear Kitty, and with my husband's second-best love
to you,

Yours, most affectionately,

'PHIA BLIVINS.

Paul had scarce finished reading the letter of the "hoosier" belle and bride, when the pull-up of a carriage at the door of his lodgings announced the arrival of Mrs. Tetherly; and in the cordial greeting of his unceremonious and genial friend, and in the work for which his pencils were all in readiness, the rather suggestive theories of Mrs. Blivins were soon forgotten.

"My dear Fane!" said Mrs. Tetherly, at last, with an appealing smile, after a few minutes of complete silence, during which he had given his best touch to the new shade of expression in her face, "I have your forgiveness and something else, to ask of you."

"Granted, before asking," replied Paul, half absently.

"Not so fast," she resumed; "I am not sure even of my pardon for what I have done; and, much less, of your assent to what I propose to do."

"How can so worthless and stray a waif as I am, at this present hour," sadly and slowly uttered Paul, with a return to the weight that had all day pressed upon his heart, "be otherwise than willing to be floated anywhere, by any chance tide that should undertake his destiny?"

Mrs. Tetherly made a playful gesture of relief.

"You have described my venturesome service so well,"

she said, "that I shall only have the trouble of explaining it to you a little more fully. I *have* 'undertaken your destiny,' my dear friend—simply making love for you, that is to say, and without asking your permission!"

Paul dropped his pencils, and listened, in puzzled silence and surprise.

"I will make a short story of it," she went on to say, "and I will not hear your answer till you have had time to think of it—half a day, at least—for we dine at six, and the afternoon is before you. I once ventured, if you remember, to write something to you about Mildred. You gave me no answer, and we never talked of it; but I have, nevertheless, cherished my little project of bringing you together—the favor you have made with her, since, by your conduct in some critical matters, very much brightening the probabilities. Well—a day or two ago, we were gossiping rather more confidentially than usual, Mildred and I. Tetherly had once told me something of a secret interest in her, which you had treasured from the time of first meeting her in America. It is true, he said it was less a tender passion than the resentment for an imaginary slight—showing itself in a desire to make a different impression upon her, for pride's sake—but the ambition to please her was enough for my argument. I assumed the point, or rather left it to her inference, that there was a hidden passion under it all."

"My dear Mrs. Tetherly!" exclaimed her astonished listener.

"Yes—and you shall hear the result, substantially and fairly. Our confab was long, and very confidential; and she confessed to me something like this: that she had not thought of loving you—that she never was aware of feeling a tender passion for any man—but, that chance had given her rare opportunities of testing your more hidden qualities of character (tests without which she would be willing to trust her happiness in no man's hands), and, of all the men she had ever known, you certainly seemed to her, at present, the most worthy to be loved."

Paul rose to his feet, unable to speak, but the pressure of a cold finger of iron—hopeless and pitiless—seemed taken from the life-nerve at his heart. He paced the room hurriedly, while his companion went on:

"Pardon me—a woman and a relative, and knowing Mildred better than you possibly can—if I prescribe to you the light in which you should look upon this confession. It is not in her nature to make a warmer one. It says everything for her—enough, at least, to assure you that it would be the foundation of a love that would last a lifetime. Besides, my dear Fane, *it reveals the fact that you might win her*—and how worthy Mildred is, of any man's winning, I need not tell you, after the portrayal

of her inmost heart, which you have given with your pencil. Do not reply! I will not hear you till we are alone together again. But one request more."

Paul was too busy with conflicting thoughts to utter a word. He stood, with knit fingers and closely-pressed lips, to listen.

"We are going to-morrow to Raven-Park, for a couple of days—ten miles from London, you know, and the residence of a bachelor-cousin of our family. Tetherly has an invitation for you, and we will take you down with us. Mildred is there already. It will, at least, be an opportunity for you to meet. No refusal, now! I will not listen to it. Make your arrangements to go, and so adieu till six! God bless you, my dear Fane!"

And in another moment, and without word or sign from Paul, except only a mechanical return of the pressure of her hand, Mrs. Tetherly was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE company at Raven-Park was principally a family-gathering. Tetherly gave a list of the guests and their peculiar points of character, before leaving Paul in his room to dress for dinner; and, as he closed the door, Paul fell to wondering how he had so mechanically consented to be brought where he was, and, particularly, how he had given in, ever so tacitly and reluctantly, to Mrs. Tetherly's improbable scheme. The approaching meeting with Miss Ashly, he felt, was to cost him an effort, inestimably as he had prized the confession of preference and esteem for him which she had made to her aunt. But, had the removal of that long festering sting from his heart left it more impressible? Would the victory of his pride warm into love? The colder judgment, sitting in the background of his troubled thoughts, said "no;" while, so utterly adrift and unloved did he feel in the world, since the marriage of Sybil Paleford, that even this vague semblance of happiness looked attractive. To turn over the blotted leaf of

his heart, and forget it if he could, but to offer the next blank page as a tablet whereon Fate was free to write, was the resolve plucked at the last moment from the perplexities of his thoughts, as he descended to the drawing-room.

The greeting from Miss Ashly, as she stood among eight or ten of her relatives, all strangers to Paul, was, of course, only a friendly cordiality. He intended to approach again the hand that pressed his so warmly, but his presentations, right and left, by his host, Sir John Morford, were scarce ended, when the door of the dining-room was thrown open, and he took his chance of neighborhood at dinner by giving his arm to the nearest lady.

But, with Mrs. Tetherly on the right hand of Sir John, and engrossed of course—Tetherly between two aunts on the same side of the table with himself—Miss Ashly directly opposite, and to be talked to, if at all, with an audience of five or six indifferent listeners—and himself between two profiles, which his artistic eye discovered, at a glance, to belong to two wooden and well-bred mediocrities—Paul ate his soup with small promise of pleasure. The usual refuge would have been easy. He could have taken his thoughts into his own brain—(serving out the dried raisins of well-preserved commonplaces, instead of fresh grapes plucked from the vine of the present moment)—but that his old pride-wound was still sensitive, though healed. Miss Ashly's cold grey eyes were seeing him in a new

light, and trying him, inevitably and for the first time, by the standards among which she had been brought up. He was piqued, not only to appear to advantage, but contentedly at his ease.

Master of appearances, as Paul constitutionally was, however, he was not master of his own nervous susceptibility. The respective estimate which he formed of himself and those around him, did not at all agree with their respective estimate of themselves and him; and this difference, which, under ordinary circumstances, would simply have amused him, acted upon him, while so much was at stake, with the republicanism of Nature. He was outvoted. It was perfectly evident to him that his neighbors were eating their dinner under the full impression of their social superiority to both Tetherly and his friend the American artist—and in the very small minority of his own opinion to the contrary, there was no consciousness of power. While he talked with a most voluble and successfully affected brilliancy, therefore, he was secretly writhing under the sense of being condescended to by those whom he amused.

And, even in the very natural blindness of Miss Ashly to the torture of his position, there was an aggravation of it. She was evidently looking at him with nothing but approbation—having been relieved, at first, of some little uneasiness, from awkwardness anticipated, but, when this was

removed, charmed with his ease and agreeableness. Her smile across the table was as genial and kindly as it was any way capable of being. Yet why should she not see (Paul's pride insisted on asking), that there was insult and contemptuous injustice for him, in the very different sort of kindness—the condescending toleration—of the manner of her relatives? He tried in vain to still the gnawing of it. He remembered over and over again, that, for the two years he had been in England, he had associated almost only with those who, by court standards, were the superiors of her family—made quite at home, by his genius, in houses of the more exclusive nobility where the lesser aristocrats around him never set foot—yet the thought was of no avail. They were Ashlys—of the blood of the proud woman who had given the first life-sting to his pride—and by that silly yet ineffaceable memory of his boyhood's mortification, they had the power to humiliate him.

The dinner seemed interminable to Paul; but the ladies at last left the table; and, with Miss Ashly's disappearance, the “amusing American artist,” as her uncles and cousins had all thought him, became suddenly silent. With the silver fruit-knife for a pencil, he wrote or sketched, very absently, on the bottom of his plate, his eyes sheltered with the hand that supported his forehead. His friend Tetherly was deep in politics, with their host, at the other end of the table. How he could ever have consented for

an instant to think of marrying Miss Ashly—binding himself to breathe, even for a second time in his whole life, the hell of such an atmosphere of relationship—was working the curl of Paul's lip into something like a smile of bitterness, when, suddenly, along the gravel-path under the window, came the quick rattle and pull-up of a post-carriage, silencing the conversation all around.

The butler entered presently, and leaned over with an audible whisper:

"Mr. and Mrs. Ashly, from Florence, Sir John! They have been to dinner, and will have the pleasure of meeting you at tea."

Sir John nodded. Tetherly gave his friend a look that he meant should be congratulatory of a mutually pleasant surprise. The guests fell to discussing how long Arthur could have been in coming from Switzerland, where he had been passing his honey-moon—whether he would take to hunting or politics, now that he had brought his wife to England for a permanency, and was to reside at Ashly Hall—when "Mrs. Arthur" would probably be presented at court, and what a talk her beauty would undoubtedly make—whether their first son would be named after the Morford or Ashly branch, and how the Paleford and Ashly blood would cross, as to features and character. The presence of the still silent American was quite forgotten by the

half dozen gentlemen at his end of the table, as they sat, with a fresh family topic, over their wine.

Paul felt his eyes grow hot and blind, with the burning flush to his brain and temples. Sybil Paleford under the same roof—a wife—and to be met with the unbetraying politeness of indifference, in a drawing-room, and before strangers! The clenched fingers with which he almost broke in two the knife in his hand—the bloodless lips of the face bent low to the table—told the effort that it cost him for self-control. To rush from the sight of those around him—to fly from the house and escape the agony of that meeting—was the wild, fierce impulse of heart and brain.

He thanked God that no one spoke to him—that he could be silent and alone with his anguish, though in the presence of unsympathizing men—that there was time to rally, and grow calm, and nerve for the bitter trial now inevitable—the trial of congratulating *her* upon her marriage! Sybil Ashly, the woman he loved most on earth, a bride—nay, a wife, and scarce a bride any longer, but already accustomed to the happiness of that new name, and now to be seen presently by him, and watched for hours in the familiar interchange of endearments with another!

And yet the secret of what he was to suffer was between

herself and him. Miss Ashly, it was true, knew the sacrifice he had made to leave that matchless girl for another's winning; but she did not know the proof of Sybil's love for *him*, hidden (still wordless and scarce believed) in the very depths of his soul—those swift, warm kisses on his eyes, as he lay (she thought, insensible!) in the twilight of that day too trying! Tetherly and his wife had known little or nothing of his passion for Sybil. Ashly, the husband, had looked upon it as a caprice of girlish attachment, which he had only to make serious love to overcome—even Colonel Paleford having concealed from him the critical improbability of his success, and the full depth of Paul's magnanimity of relinquishment.

And what was the story of that wooing? How was *she*—Sybil Paleford, into whose willing eyes he had poured such glowing devotion from his own, under Italy's love-kindling sunsets, dreamy moonlights, and calm, sweet mornings—how was she persuaded to forget him? That it was not a resentment, and not because his motives were misunderstood, he was certain. Colonel Paleford was a man of too high honor not to have done him full justice in the farewell of which he was the bearer to his daughter. And there would have been some show of reason for the acceptance of Mr. Ashly, too, if the wealth of which she thus became the mistress, were necessary for the support of her father—but, with his moderate competency, he had

preferred to remain in Italy, and end his days in that milder climate; his daughter and her husband to pass the winters with him there. Was Paul's romance of belief in woman's unworldliness of love to be thus shaken? Had the girlhood, so independent of a court, and so disinterested in the manifestation of a persevering preference for a poor artist, passed into a womanhood of selfishness—a taste only for luxury and display? On this one wild dream he had built, unconsciously, but wholly and believingly, his hope of inspiring the passion pictured in his ideal. By Sybil Paleford, or never in this world, he had thought to be romantically loved. This was the life-enigma, stored away—hidden in his inmost heart—but, with all its uncertainty, most fondly and resistlessly trusted.

It was well for Paul, that, in the hour of unobserved self-absorption given him by the gentlemen's remaining at table, his crowding thoughts had time to traverse their tumultuous circle and come round again to his composure of disappointment. Upon the sad misgiving that Sybil was, after all, more like others than he had dreamed her to be—that she had loved him when near, and soon forgot him for another when he was gone—he once more became self-possessed, and calm outwardly. His love-dream for life was over, but, with the certainty of that, he could at least entomb its wreck in his own memory. It was in the past, and he could hide it from the world.

The long windows to the floor were all open, for it was a warm October night, with a brilliant moon; and, as the guests followed Sir John into the drawing-room by the folding-doors, Paul stepped out upon the long piazza that ran the length of the house. The formidableness of a deliberate approach, to give, with the other gentlemen, his welcome to the new arrivals, rather staggered his courage. If he could enter at the side, by one of the windows opening upon the lawn, and speak to the bride—to Mrs. Ashly—when the attention of the company was less concentrated upon her, he thought the embarrassment might be less. At least, he might bathe his hot eyes in the fresh, calm air of night, and, from the stars, familiar to his happier hours, get a thought, perhaps, to help build the barrier that he needed.

The brilliant flood of light, from the windows of the drawing-room, made the foliage of the low-hanging trees upon the lawn too golden for even the moonlight to be perceptible; and the stars, up through the glow of the atmosphere immediately around the house, were scarce visible at all. Paul leaned over the railing for a moment; but the concentration of the light and the sound of voices drew him insensibly onward, and, passing one or two pillars of the colonnade, he came suddenly upon the window commanding a full view of the company within.

A sense of alarm—a staggering of the brain-poise for a

moment—but he remembered that he was still outside, in the darkness. He was not within the four walls which bounded the light for those in her presence. He was not visible, to *her*! But she, to *him*, through that open window!—oh God, how beautiful she once more beamed, a wonder, upon his eyes! Had he forgotten how surpassing was that beauty! Or had Sybil, with her new happiness—her happiness as Ashly's wife—grown more fair? Fairer she certainly seemed to him, even than he had dreaded, with his artist's memory and poet's imagination, that, as a bride, she would appear. Her type of beauty—(he marvelled as his eyes refused to see, but still saw it!)—was completer than when he loved her. It was higher beauty, now, than when she had turned from court homage to think only of *him*—higher beauty, in England and as an Ashly, than, under the passionate sky of Italy, giving a joyous girl's first heart-waking to Paul Fane! She was paler, now, and more calmly and strangely noble.

Waiting his opportunity to speak to her, without all eyes upon the unsuspected trial of his courage, he still stood, an unobserved spectator of the scene, by the column of the piazza. The tribute to Mrs. Ashly's remarkable loveliness was universal. In her white evening dress as a bride, and with a coronet of costly pearls circling the shadow of her golden hair—her exquisitely moulded shoulders and arms fairly dazzling with their glowing

and fine-grained whiteness, in the light, and her completed fullness of figure as a woman without a fault, either of sculpture-line or queenliness of mien—she sat at a slight angle of turn from the window where Paul stood, but, by the next window, apparently, when not occupied with conversation, looking out upon the lawn. Around her chair, more or less distant, but with their eyes fixed upon her, stood the gentlemen who had just been presented—Sir John at the right arm of her *fauteuil*, and the bridegroom leaning upon its carved back, looking down upon her as she sat beneath him. Paul gave to the happy man one look of his practised and searching eye! He had studied that face too well as an artist to misread it now. The Ashly iciness of repose had come uppermost again. With his cold and habitual contemptuousness, the bridegroom was blest! He was secure in his freely-acknowledged happiness! But, even on the torturing throe of uncontrollable envy and jealousy, which Paul was guilty of feeling, for the moment, there was a gleam of wicked light. In that circle of men—the well-dressed, well-mannered, unexceptionably aristocratic gentlemen who now stood around her—her relatives and intimates for life—there was not one, who, by the instinct of her nature, would ever seem her equal. They were *her* inferiors—nay—thank God! they were even *his*! With the husband who stood behind her, there, in lordly possession—however he might

now be enriched, beyond all possibility of being again reached or mated, for value of life by a poor artist—he had once compared himself and felt worthier than an Ashly of her love.

A step approached from behind, as this dark thought gave place to nobler feelings; and Tetherly, coming in from his cigar upon the lawn, slipped his arm into Paul's, to have his company at the tea-table. Mrs. Tetherly presided at the urn in the corner; but, on their way, the two gentlemen together gave their first greeting to the bride—the anticipated embarrassment, and scarce controllable emotion of Paul, being fortunately and wholly veiled under the confusion of that double welcome. Tetherly was constitutionally ceremonious. Paul took the tone of his manner, and was ceremonious, too. He noticed that Mrs. Ashly's voice did not utter his name audibly, though her lips moved. The pressure of her hand was uncertain. She replied to his one question of her father's health, with a tone that, to him, seemed forced and mechanical, but in no way likely to seem other than commonplace to those around; and, feeling Mr. Ashly's eye very steadily fixed upon him, Paul shook hands with the bridegroom, and, echoing his friend's welcome of him to England, passed on. The ordeal was over—he scarce knew when, or how!

“My dear Paul!” said Mrs. Tetherly, in an under-tone,

as she handed him a cup of tea, "thank God for the old magnetism, as strong as ever! She loves you!"

Paul had but one image in his bewildered thoughts, and he looked at his friend in dumb amazement.

"I have been talking with Mildred," she continued, "and she confesses to having wholly disparaged you, even with her already confessed, but hitherto measured preference. The comparison with our dull kinsfolk, to-day, has revealed to her your better clay."

"My dear friend!" exclaimed Paul, with the expostulatory tone of mere politeness, but scarce collecting his scattered senses sufficiently to comprehend the meaning of his zealous and partial friend.

"For *her*, a full confession—let me assure you!" added Mrs. Tetherly, with a look over her shoulder as she rose (for Sir John had taken her hand at the moment to lead her to the piano), "but *au revoir!* and more of it by-and-by. She is alone, at this moment," she added, pointing to her niece, sitting thoughtfully at an open window.

But Paul was not equal even to the ordinary effort of conversation—much less to the difficult exercise of tact and delicacy which would be required by his present position toward Miss Ashly. His mind and heart, in spite of all struggle of judgment and principle against it, were now full of burning thoughts of another. To escape from looking longer upon that peerless bride was

the present prompting of his conscience—the cruel need of his weakness and passion. That he should take an early and unceremonious leave, with the morrow's morning—never again to see Sybil Paleford—Sybil Ashly—if it were possible to be avoided—he resolved, of course; but, for that evening, he was to breathe the air of bewildering nearness to her, and to be included in the same hospitality; and, that night, he was to pass, under the same roof with her glorious beauty, in all its enchantment—ay, in all its happiness! And, with this torture of thought crowding on soul and brain, with anguish too intolerable to be concealed, he needed darkness around him. The unwitnessing or unrevealing stars were the only company he could bear.

Like a far-extended floor of the drawing-room, the closely-shaven lawn of Raven-Park extended away, its limits lost in the wilderness of thickets and noble trees; and, from shadow to shadow of the leafy breaks in the moonlight, Paul now wandered, thanking God to be alone. The night was soft and breathlessly still. The music of the electric fingers of his friend, pouring from the open windows, was audible in its mellowed and best effect throughout the grounds. He was conscious, at last, of being soothed by this continued and unseen ministration; and seating himself upon the railing of a bridge over a serpentine stream—the outlet to a sheet of artificial water

on the edge of the lawn—he gave his thoughts up to the music.

But, a sudden fear began to take possession of Paul's nervously excited brain. Surely she would not play *that* romance! Would not common pity—would not instinct—would not the guardian angels on the watch—Sybil's mother—Heaven in its mercy—prevent the wakening of that, *now*?

She who was at this moment bewitching the formal air of Raven-Park, was no ordinary player. Paul had caught, for her portrait, the expression of the rapt genius that found its way to the ivory keys through her nervous and pliant fingers. But her inspiration did not find vent alone in following the music-thoughts of the great masters. She was an *improvisatrice* upon the instrument—the pulses of her brain not more effortless than the strings, in the life they drew from her. Her playing was usually capricious. For indifferent listeners it would be oftenest a *mélange*—the airs of operas, old songs, waltzes, and any chance-remembered compositions, woven together. To those she loved, however, and to whom she played confidentially, it was a pouring out of her own heart in an irregular improvisation—varying, according to her mood, but oftenest rising, toward the close, into the most passionate utterance of the feeling so long chained within her.

The overflowing heart, locked and frozen for half a life under the ice of her reserve, thus found a voice.

But she would sometimes take a theme—giving the hint of a story, she would tell it afterwards in music. And of this more sympathetic and descriptive improvisation, both Paul and Sybil Paleford had been exceedingly fond, in the days they had passed together at Florence—one strange romance, particularly, possessing for them a singular fascination, though it was seldom given but at the last hour by the excited player, and with feelings wholly abandoned to the theme. It represented a love, timid in its waking, but strengthening without the chance for an avowal, and growing, by suppression, into madness—based upon a German story of great wildness and beauty. The exchange of feeling that had never been made in words, by Paul and Sybil, had been passed and repassed between them, on that music's electric magnetism, in eloquence of fire!

The player, as Paul now recognized, was becoming gradually unconscious of listeners. By the flitting forms passing to and fro between himself and the windows, he could see that the company had been enticed out upon the lawn by the loveliness of the night; and Mrs. Tetherly, left alone in the room, had probably abandoned herself to the witchery of the instrument. It was changefully

expressive of reverie—sad for a moment or two, then strong or brilliant; but, at last (and it was this which had startled Paul with such sudden alarm), hovering with evident absent-mindedness over the commencement of the German story. To the touching and melancholy air that ran through it she made a dreamer's capricious approaches, now rushing upon it by an unmistakable note or two, then turning off with some whim of variation, as if abruptly forgetful of what she had thought to play. Would she, indeed, venture upon it? Would she not remember that there might be a heart beating within sound of those ivory keys, whose secret, whose dumb sad prisoner, it would drive wild in its cell?

But, as Paul stood, risen to his feet, and listening with the alarm of nervous expectation, a flowing figure in white came with uncertain movement toward the shadow of the gigantic willow overhanging the bridge. At the step with which she crossed the line of shade made upon the broad lawn by the clump of trees nearest to him—emerging suddenly into the radiant light of the clear full moon—he saw that it was the bride. She came alone. Yet how unlike herself, as he had seen her in that drawing-room, a half hour before! Her head was bent low, as if to be blind to the bright night around her, and, with fingers tightly interlocked, the palms of her hands were turned downwards with convulsive struggle before her. The air

of stateliness and repose was no longer there. With shoulders drawn forward, and face unseen in its depressed turning from the moon, there was only her bridal wreath with its glittering pearls, to make certain that it was she.

Hid, himself, in the dark shadow of the drooping branches that fell like a curtain around him, Paul checked the impulse to speak and warn her of his neighborhood—but, on that instant of stillness, burst suddenly the clear melody of the dreaded romance! It began with a mournful and sustained sweetness—a love-telling which they had both declared wholly irresistible. The bride started and looked back. Imploringly and tenderly the wondrous wail of the lover's unheard prayer rose upon the stillness. She lifted her head more eagerly to listen. Another advancing step, to place her hand upon the railing of the bridge, and Paul's voice broke the silence. It was her name only—her new name—uttered with the instinctive impulse that he had no right to leave her longer unaware of his presence. But, with a single start of surprise, and a syllable—the one sweet syllable he had never thought to hear from her lips again—his own familiar name—the step with which he was about to pass and leave her to her solitude was arrested.

She looked into his face for one moment—the wild notes rose upon the air with the despairing madness of the

lover—the madness of which they had both learned to interpret the musical intensity of expression—and, with a short quick scream, but with terrible suddenness and vehemence, she flung her arms about his neck. One close clasp—one more utterance, each of the other's name—and the form within his bewildered hold began to weigh upon his arms. The head fell aside insensibly. Approaching feet told him that the scream had been heard over the lawn. A fleck of moonlight streamed down through the branches upon the pale features and closed eyes. One long look—one maddening, clinging kiss to her insensible lips—and, laying her gently down where the coming friends would find her, Paul fled into the darkness. The grove and its deep shadows, beyond the lawn, received him. He could not, even for aid to her, meet human faces. To be alone—alone, with his own wicked, but oh ! delirious joy of madness—out-frenzying, in its passionate intensity, even the madness of the music—he felt to be his thirst, with that kiss upon his lips. The night was short. The moon set upon the woods of Raven-Park, and the sun rose, in what, to that wondering guest, were but successive moments.

With the opening of the doors by the servants, Paul passed to his room ; and, leaving a hurried note of apology and farewell, which Tetherly would make acceptable to their host, but promising to his friend a better explanation

of his sudden departure when they should meet, he was, in a few minutes, alone on his way to London.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was a month after the visit to Raven-Park, and London, though, to the out-door observer, as crowded as ever, was, according to the Court Journal, "quite empty." The Ashlys, among others, who had "the old place" to go down to, were "down in the country;" and Tetherly, by every mail or two, was writing urgently to his friend Fane, to accept the invitation to the great family gathering at Ashly Hall, and thus join him for a few weeks of hunting, shooting, and Christmas-keeping.

But Paul was busy with a purpose which he had not yet communicated to his friends the Tetherlys. He was preparing to return to his own country; and the completion of the various professional commissions which, with his nearly two years in England, had largely accumulated on his hands, occupied his time so fully that he could very easily plead a pressure of engagements. As the thought of home grew upon him, even a contemplated trip to Paris, to take his leave of the most intimate friend he had found

in Europe, the Princess C——, was reluctantly abandoned. He wrote to her, instead. And, to that letter—(simply an adieu of grateful friendship, with which it is not necessary to detain the reader)—the following was her characteristic reply:—

PARIS, —, —.

MY DEAR FANE:

The sadness at the news of your letter, is so struggling for the present with my resentment at your not coming to say adieu to us, that I am doubting whether this will turn out a scolding or a farewell. I can scarce see to write, for the tears that are in such a silly hurry to forgive you—but how dreadfully unkind and hard-hearted of you, to think of going without a word of good-bye! Is it quite safe, do you think, to commit yourself to the retributive ocean with a sin of such enormity on your shoulders?

But why do you go? I know little of your country, except what I have learned from common opinion (and an occasional talk with Mary Evenden and Mrs. Cleverly), but it seems to me that you are much more in your proper place where you are. The statue should not return to its quarry, my friend! If there were any great question at stake—any call on your patriotism—it might be different. Were the “stars and stripes” in danger, or were your countrymen likely to starve or become paganized, without you, there might be reason in flying home to turn your pencil into a sword, or your palette into a loaf of bread or a Bible. America is, still, pretty free, I hear however; and plenty to eat for everybody; and no one has any occasion to continue a sinner, there, except from pure choice, and in the exercise of his republican liberty! So, why desert the temple where your genius has its fitting

pedestal, to go back to the cave where at best you will only serve your country by seeming as patriotically unhewn as the stones around you.

Observe, I mean no disparagement to America! The greatest heroes of Europe began as babies (I have always understood); and previous to their great achievements and glory, had worn the unmentionable varieties of raiment rendered necessary by the early stage of their progressive manners. History, of course, will give your infant republic the usual century or two of cradle-rocking and nurse-needing—passing over in silence, or without coming to particulars, everything except the great infantine epochs, the national weaning, rash, measles, and vaccination. And (seriously), that there are great elements maturing under the rough surface—great seed germinating among the weeds which America has had no time as yet to eradicate—I fully believe. Pray consider me as paying all honor to your transatlantic *probabilities*!

To return to yourself—it is not altogether the price you are to receive for your pictures—not that, nor even the quantity of renown with it—that is to make you happy, my dear Fane! For an artist of your quality, most particularly, there must be *discriminating appreciation* in the very atmosphere. You must be conscious of appreciative eyes, always waiting for what you do. Call it vanity, if you please, but inspiration faints for lack of praise from judicious lips. And are you to have this (for your Europe-trained pencil), in a country of no leisure? With nothing but hurry and money-making around you, are you to feel sympathy, or breathe freely?

Yet, you will go! Oh, I have moulded too often the quiet lines of your very complying-looking mouth, not to know that there is a will of steel within the velvet scabbard. You will go—and I

shall not see you first—for so you have made up your mind—but, one word as to the more yielding heart you are to take with you, after all! It will be more at home than your pencil in America—indeed, the less play for the genius the more for the heart, is a “Q. E. D.” in the mathematics of love.

Mary Evenden has been with me, as you know, for nearly two years. I need not tell you how well I have studied her, in that time. She was a new book of Nature to me, and I learned her by heart. The wonder that she was!—a most lovely creature, with a consciousness in the brain only! a woman whose heart beat to her intellect alone! We have studied beauty together, as nothing but sculpture can well teach it. But she herself being, as I say, an intense study to me, I have seen the gradual deepening of her character with her sense of beauty—and its warm sunshine (let me tell you) has been tinting the leaves of a heart yet to flower. The forgotten woman within that symmetry of sleeping Ariadne is ready to awake. She must love soon—and with a new-blown though belated freshness and fulness that will give a noon with the dew of morning. Are you curious enough in your knowledge of our sex to see the value of a phenomenon so rare?

And yet you came so near one of those loves of instinct, to which genius, at least, should be the exception! Miss Paleford—how beautiful she was!—how noble!—how romantically proud and pure! Yet she forgot you—(with not much time either!)—and for a man who was not much to be forgotten for! Would Mary Evenden, with her soul first wrapped up in your genius, wake, at last, to your loveliness as a man, and then forget you in a year! You see what I wish to foreshadow for you. Mrs. Cleverly goes soon home to America, and Mary with her. Watch this fair girl,

my dear Fane! and wake, for yourself, the love that, half-won already, dreams of you unconsciously while it slumbers.

It is for *me* that your departure is the saddest. America is far off, and it will be long before you return to Europe—if ever. I shall not see you again in this world, or I shall see you when I am old and changed. And it were not because you had ever positively thought me to be beautiful, that this latter alternative were painful, but because the memory beautifies with time and absence, and we do not even meet with the eyes with which we parted—expecting *more*, besides not having seen the reconciling gradations with which there has become *less*. Spite of the most loyal attachment—the most faithful constancy—you would not see me, after ten years or twenty, without wondering (vexed with yourself, perhaps, that you were compelled to do so) how you had ever paid the homage to me which you still remembered—how the ideal which you had so long cherished, and which had thus suddenly vanished, never to return, had possibly found form and color! For I have, thus far, contrived to charm your eye, I know very well; and I should continue to charm it, were you not absent long.

Part, however, though, it appears, we must (and, if for more than a year or two, I would rather it should be for ever), we have something even more precious to preserve than the hope of meeting again—the memory, my dear Paul, of a *friendship irreproachable!* I began, thinking it would not be so, I confess. My life, as you know, is all darkness within, as it is all sunshine without; and the forbidden moonlight I had dreamed of was in your tenderness of looks and ways. But as your mind gradually elevated the tone of courtesy between us, overruling and correcting the first superficial fascination of your manners and person, I found reverence

for woman among the graces that had pleased me. I was hedged about, for you, with the sacred circle of purity—of the light of which I had been (God forgive me!) ready to be forgetful. It was necessary to be still pure, to be so thought of still. And this, to me, was the renewal of a dream!

Yes, for I had begun life with romantic, but sinless friendship for my vision of happiness—the sacrifice of name and hand for court policy and fortune, but the belief that I was thus free of control, and could choose where I would for a pure interchange of heart. I went on trustingly. I tried many of your sex—less and less joyfully or believingly, each one—and when we first met, you and I, it was a long dream, well-nigh over. I was weary of making friends, finding them unworthy, and rejecting them. Though surprised into an irresistible preference and tenderness for you, I felt no confidence in the nature of the return.

“Ah, with a deference like yours—tempting a woman to be only what she wills to be—most of my sex would run little risk! I knew your nature—its passion, and its adventurousness—and that the world to you was new, and to be well tried. A word from my lips would have broken the spell, I was, many a moment, tremblingly aware. But there was ever between us that unseen wall of adamant—your honoring deference, your blind belief in me—and, with unblemished memories of each other, thank God! we are parting now!

I have now confessed to you, I repeat, what an experiment this has been to me—an experiment as to you, but no less as to myself. Pursuits and tastes in sympathy—opportunities without restraint—incidental circumstances in the situation of both facilitating an intimacy—and (I may say now) yourself, for loveliness, quite

unsurpassed in my knowledge of men—it was an ordeal study of your standard of woman, as it was of the strength to be true to it, in my own soul. Through, oh, what temptation and passion I was to represent, for you, that standard's unsullied brightness! There were times (we may remember them if we are to meet no more!) when the heart seemed too human for the test. I have driven into the marble with my chisel, when at work, with you by my side, many an impulse, that, with but one nerve unguarded, would have flung the inspiration around your neck! I saw your own thought—the rally against your own share of the moment's trial, in the curve of the trembling lip, that still told of your honor for woman. My triumph was in it! I was strong again. And I know, now, thank God! that there may be friendship sweet and pure, even though the wild love that might embitter it has stood near and ready.

But the curtain has dropped upon our drama, at last. We retire, to hat and shawl ourselves like other people, and take our common way upon the sidewalk, with the crowd. Though our audience of hopes and fears is dispersed, however—the lights out, and the orchestra vocal no longer—let us keep the interest of the play under our own shut eyelids, for a dream and a memory! You will be to me, always, the unsuspected hero of my most trying life-drama. Let me be something, to you, longer remembered than the foot-lamps that are to burn for us no more! Let me be to you, as you will certainly be to me, a romance of the past.

For news—I have a statue of Egeria in model, that I had thought you were to see. Its inspiration will be wanting, I fear, now that you are to be gone when it is finished. I worked so much better with the thought of your sweet earnest eyes over my shoulder!

But, farewell, my dear Paul! I would write these tears into my parting words, if I knew how. My heart follows you, believe me! May God bless you!

Yours, with affectionate devotion,

C—.

P. S. Mary Evenden has come in before my letter was sealed. She sends her love to you, with a message. Mrs. Cleverly, hearing of your proposed departure, wishes to go home (she and Mary) under your kind care. This is only to inform you of her intention. She will write to you, herself, as to the arrangements for the voyage, the joining you in London, etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE delay of Paul's voyage homeward, in consequence of Mrs. Cleverly's intention of taking passage with him, weighed heavily on his already depressed spirits. It would have been a mere trifle at any other time to be thus detained; but, with his labors completed, and a couple of weeks of comparative leisure on his hands, there was awkwardness in still excusing himself from a flying visit, at least, to Ashly Hall. He might have run over to Paris, to accompany his friends to England; but the letter of the princess (written on the supposition that she was to see

him no more) had a kind of obituary tenderness, after which he felt a delicacy in again making his visible appearance to her. Overworked with the completion of his professional commissions, and his pencil, of course, distasteful as a refuge from depression—London Novemberish, and his acquaintances and friends out of town—he was fairly driven to the wall by his melancholy. In this extremity of mood, one foggy and dull morning, he closed the shutters upon the imperfect struggles of the sun to make a day, lighted his candles, and had recourse to his one habitual comfort when all else failed—the society of his mother. With the world shut out, he thus opened his heart to her :

LONDON, —.

MY DEAREST MOTHER :

You are thinking of me to-day, I know, as half-way across the water. I was to have sailed a fortnight ago (as I wrote you), and should have been happy indeed to do so, but for Mrs. Cleverly's delays at Paris. She and Mary are to come with me, and the good lady's milliners and dress-makers, I suppose, have been less prompt than her kindnesses. Boston is to be kept astonished for a year or two, of course, with the fashions she brings home—the tribute to the magnificent great heart that beats under her "latest fashion," being as little thought of by herself, as it is by the goodness-blind world she cares only to dazzle.

I shall be with you soon, however, God willing. And, I am very certain, it will be to leave you no more! Once at home again,

and, with the lessons I have learned, I shall be like the caterpillar who has made a chance flight on a balloon—not very impatient even for the elevation with my own wings as a butterfly. I have been out of reach of the dew of your tears, and of the soft moss and violets of your every day's love, dearest mother!

Of course I am not so much of a child as to run prematurely home, leaving my manhood's errand of ambition unperformed. If it were better for my development of genius to remain longer in Europe—one year or twenty—I would choke down the homesickness now busy in my throat, I am sure you will believe. But, very deliberately, and looking at it from all points of view, I think my own country is *my mind's* native air. After trying its lungs in the perfumed atmospheres of Europe—(and trying them, I confess, by arts of inhalation not elsewhere to be learned, and necessary for their full trial of expansibility)—I find my American soul and brain, as well as my American heart, taste, and temper, pining for America to breathe in.

I have had success in Europe—in England more particularly—to my full deserving, I am very free to own. But, when I think to what I half or wholly owe it, I would rather bury all but the lesson! It is not to myself, nor to my pencil, that I owe what I may call my present prosperous reputation. I owe it mainly to adventitious causes—causes to whose aid and kindness I am properly grateful, of course, but to which I would rather not be longer indebted. I have painted many pictures, and for “noble” sitters. And to paint on, and for the same class of “patrons,” looks more and more possible, every day. I have found it easy to continue at the level upon which I began my English recognition and appreciation. But I began where I never could have reached by my own merit only. I came with court introductions which were wholly unpro-

fessional and accidental—dining with dukes and marquises, and then patronized as an artist for having been their guest. My zealous friends were all aristocrats, and they have brought aristocracy to sit to me.

And what better would I have?—perhaps you ask, dearest mother! Till you have thought of it—perhaps till you have tried it—this would seem happiness enough. And I scarce think I shall be successful in explaining to you, even now, why such “bread and butter” is to be “quarrelled with.”

To be appreciated *below* my present level, seems to me the liberty I want. And this, with the false lustre of my present false position, I should, at least, never believe myself to be. To pass *up* from one stratum of society to another, in this country, is difficult enough. My republican pride would have fretted at that, if I had not chanced, as the proverb has it, “to come in at a window.” But to be ever honestly at home, on the stratum *below* where you have once been conspicuous or acknowledged, is quite as difficult. You are looked at through the eyes of your grand acquaintances, by all whom those acquaintances look down upon. Whatever might have been their decision as to your merit, if you could have appealed to it without influence or favor, it is inseparable from illusion, as it is. And so naturally does it seem to be a result of aristocratic institutions—the making each class take its tastes and estimates of talent from the class above—that there is almost no such thing as individual and independent opinion. They think by classes. They believe in you by recommendation of higher authority than their own judgment.

Perhaps it is the instinct for my natural level, that makes me yearn for the appreciation of those who are not “grand folks”—not lordships and ladyships. But while condescension or patronage

makes tinsel of the admiration it bestows, the admiration is even more untruthful and unworthy which is paid from servility, and prompted by obsequious imitation. There are exceptions, no doubt, to this subserviency to rank, but I have not found them. Following my longing for holier sympathy, I have again and again picked out Nature's nobility from the middle class—gifted, refined, and apparently high-hearted, men and women, such as I wished for friends—and my disappointment has been thus far invariable. More than for all else, I found myself valued for my familiar acquaintance with great people.

But, while this looks as if high life in England were the most appreciative of Art—as if court air, on the whole, were the most natural element of genius—there are *conditions*, even to the enjoyment of this, which, to republican lungs, make it quite unbreathable. I have been astonished to know that some of the most eminent men of genius, here, never think of taking their wives into the society they frequent. Artists and authors—names known the world over—go nightly to the parties of the nobility, and stay at the country-houses of their great acquaintances, leaving at home wives and daughters who are uninquied after and unthought of. It is looked upon as a very convenient and proper economy for the usual poverty of a man of genius; and they number it among the refinements of good-breeding to practise a “delicacy on *such subjects*”—inquiring neither into the extent of an artist's or author's wardrobe, nor into the family or debts with which he may chance to be encumbered.

I am coming home, dearest mother, to be happy in American liberty—the liberty not only of sinking to where, by the laws of specific gravity, I belong, but of being looked at, after I get to

that level, *through one pair of eyes at a time*. The liberty to rise, or the liberty to fall, and, at any level, to be judged of by the simple individual opinion, without class condescension, class servility, or class prejudice, seems to me to be American only. *The hell of social life, and of all life, is false position*—I am fully persuaded—and, in England, an artist, at least, can have nothing else. But I have said enough of this. You will think the London fog, from which I fled to pen and ink, has overtaken me!

And now, with my head upon your lap, what else shall I confess to you, dear mother?

My heart, as well as my pride and my pencil, has had its lessons since I left you. It has been instructive to all three “to see the world.” I have been beloved, and I have loved; and I come home, not only without a wife, but, for preference, very much where I started. I despair of ever being loved by one woman for all that I should wish to be loved for. Only a corner seems to be wanted in the house of which we offer the whole. Those who have shown partiality for me, hitherto, have done so for such different reasons! One loved me for my appreciative discrimination and flattery of portrayal, and, her I changed into a friend; one, for the proof I had chanced to give of qualities of character she thought rare (and, by *her* final preference, I was repaid for a long remembered scorn); one for my personal magnetism, felt only when near, and her (loving her most of all, and wildly and passionately I shame to say!) I helped give to the bridegroom now happy with her; and there was a fourth who has confessed to a sacred friendship for me that might have been love, and this last precious tribute was to you—for what I had learned of you—for my honor of woman and my never-wavering deference of belief

in her. Then there was Mary Evenden, who, when I started on this triple pilgrimage (of heart, pride, and pencil), loved me for my genius only—and who loves it still, or more (and that only), now that we return together—and for her I felt no passion at home, and I feel none now. Yet with my sad knowledge of the incompleteness of all love, I should be happiest, perhaps, with what she would not fail me in. I have a presentiment sometimes—reasoning upon it only, and with the pulse of my heart shut down—that the *mind's love* (if there must be one quality among many to be alone valued and appreciated), is the best worth securing and living for. She would begin with it, at least—our pure, sweet Mary!

So much for the heart and pride I bring home to you. My pencil, I think, will return also, to breathe in its native air more freely. The architecture of the great temple of Art is undoubtedly more complete on this side the water. But, while, in it, one artist is but a brick—bricks sustaining him below, but immovable bricks pressing on him from above—in America he is the tent pitched in the desert, with the sunshine and air all around him. I feel the want of this singleness and free fame. Genius develops here, and is rewarded, by schools—a gregariousness of effort and dependence which (for me, certainly) smothers all hope of individuality and fire. Though I know I have improved in the knowledge and dexterities of Art, while abroad, I wait till I get home for the inspiration to conceive what shall be only my own, and achieve in it a triumph. Republican air must loose the blood in my now fettered wrist and brain.

I will keep my letter open, to add to it any news I may get tomorrow, as to our voyage and movements. Perhaps I may have

need to turn over another leaf of my sadness, for your kind reading, if kept longer in suspense. For to-day, however, farewell, and, that God may preserve you to bless once more these weary eyes, prays fervently, dearest mother, your affectionate

PAUL.

A postscript to the foregoing letter announced the arrival in London of Mrs. Cleverly and Mary, and the date of their proposed embarkation for the voyage. Contrary to Paul's wishes, his friends the Tetherlys became aware of his intention to steal off thus quietly, and, by Mrs. Cleverly's delays, they were enabled to hear of him as still in London, after his written farewell. They came down to Liverpool from Ashly Hall, to bring him the kind adieux of Miss Mildred and Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Ashly, and to see the last of him on the English shore. But, by both of them, it was a farewell hard to utter. By him it was still harder to receive and respond to. The leaning of the ship to the pressure of the fair wind, and the last waving of the hands, as the returning pilot-boat took those two dear friends from his sight, was a relief to a heart overburdened.

With the close of that voyage, and the return of the American artist, Mr. Paul Fane, from Europe, we come upon that part of his history that is already known. The entrance upon his profession, after his few years of foreign study and travel, was naturally the earliest point at which Fame, in his own country, would recognise his career, and, with that, commences commonly what knowledge of him is now upon men's lips. His adoption of a style of Art peculiarly his own, his doubtful success for a while, his marriage to Miss Mary Evenden, and his struggles with poverty and misappreciation (her love and completeness of sympathy forming the whole sunshine of his life, to himself, as it did its most visible beauty and poetry to the eyes of others)—all this is in hearsay while he is living, and (should his pictures live after him) likely to be written of, by-and-by. There were apprenticeships little understood, however—*trainings of his heart and pride, as well as of his pencil*—which, the author has thought it might be curious to tell. This book has accordingly confined itself to those secret mouldings of his genius and character "*which were else untold*;" but, by the reader's acquaintance with which, he will be enabled to comprehend the impulses to Fane's artistic career and style, as well as the

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